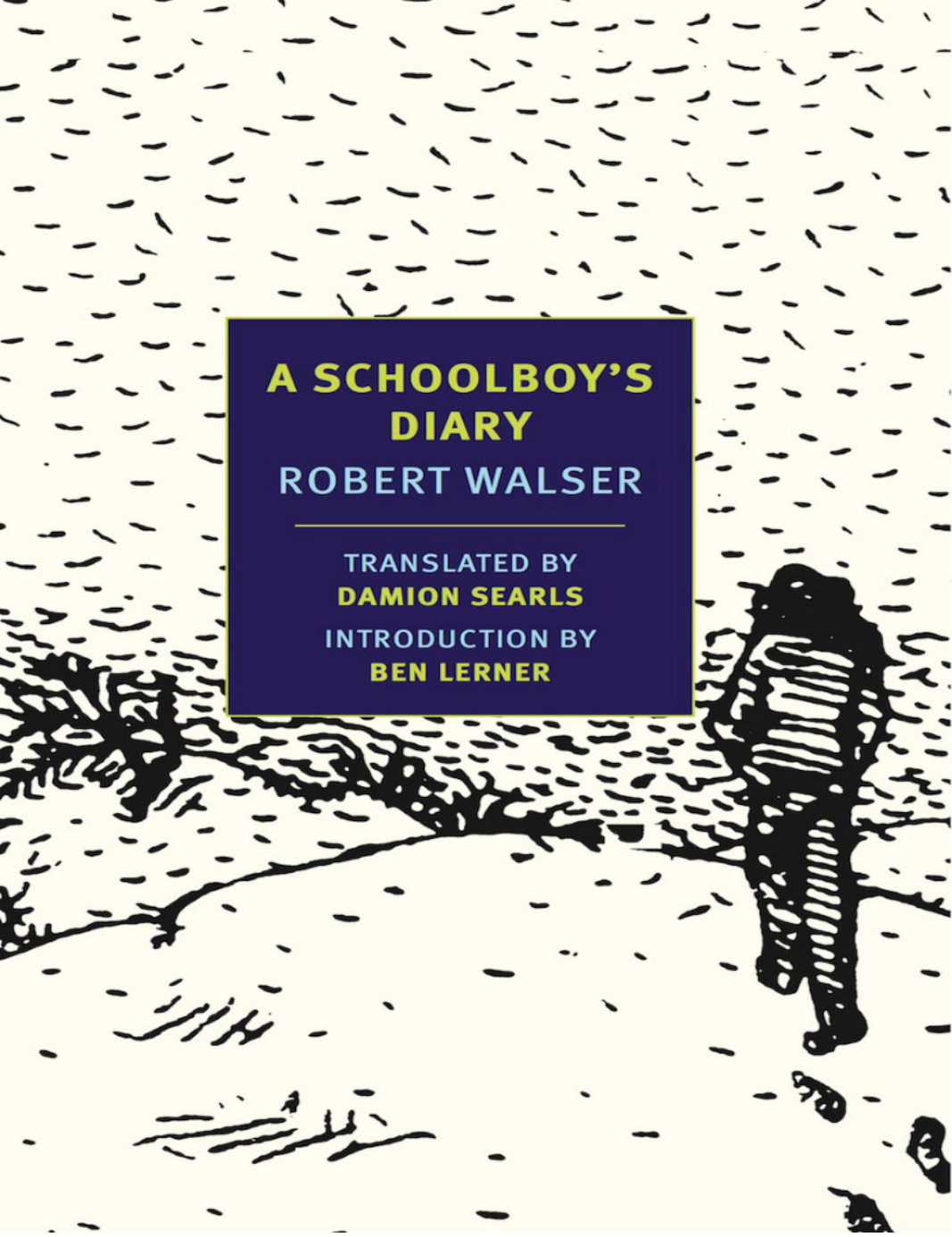
A SCHOOLBOY'S DIARY
ROBERT WALSER
TRANSLATED BY
DAMION SEARLS
INTRODUCTION BY
BEN LERNER

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Annotation

A Schoolboy's Diary brings together more than seventy of Robert Walser's strange and wonderful stories, most never before available in English. Opening with a sequence from Walser's first book, "Fritz Kocher's Essays," the complete classroom assignments of a fictional boy who has met a tragically early death, this selection ranges from sketches of uncomprehending editors, overly passionate readers, and dreamy artists to tales of devilish adultery, sexual encounters on a train, and Walser's service in World War I. Throughout, Walser's careening, confounding, delicious voice holds the reader transfixed.

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Robert Walser

A Schoolboy's Diary and Other Stories

INTRODUCTION

"SECRETLY, I love art," declares the young Fritz Kocher in one of his school essays. "But it's not a secret anymore… because now I've been careless and blabbed it. Let me be punished for that and made an example of." Robert Walser's narrators are always praising obedience and punishment: "I want to be industrious and obey whoever deserves to be obeyed"; "A firm command and silent obedience — that would really be much better"; "Anything forced on me, whose necessity has been mutely insisted upon from every side, I try to approach obligingly, and like it"; "We are cowards; we deserve an Inquisitor to discipline us"; and so on. At the same time, however, Walser's narrators — especially his schoolboys, and there is something of the schoolboy in all of his narrators — are possessed by a levity that borders on giddiness. Walser's writing has an energy that exceeds or undercuts or otherwise complicates its own demand to be disciplined.

The associational flights of Fritz's class assignments escape the teacher's authority even as they appeal to it:

Colors fill up your mind too much with all sorts of muddled stuff. Colors are too sweet a muddle, nothing more. I love things in one color, monotonous things. Snow is such a monotonous song. Why shouldn't a color be able to make the same impression as singing? White is like a murmuring, whispering, praying. Fiery colors, like for instance Autumn colors, are a shriek. Green in midsummer is a many-voiced song with all the highest notes. Is that true? I don't know if that's right. Well, the teacher will surely be so kind as to correct it.

No teacher is in a position to say whether midsummer green is a many-voiced song, at least not without assuming a position of absurd literality, and so Fritz's evocation of the teacher's corrective power is a way of revealing its limits. Still, it would be wrong to say this passage *only* mocks or ironizes submissiveness. There is the typically Walserian statement: "I love things in one color, monotonous things." Praise for the monotonous, the uniform, the mundane, the insignificant — such sentiments are everywhere in Walser's work and maintain a crucial ambiguity. On the one hand they are expressions of poetic attunement to those aspects of the world we too readily overlook, and for which writers concerned with heroic exploits often have no time. On the other hand, Walser's celebration of the monotonous or uniform returns us to his fascination with subservience, with relinquishing all personality to imposed order: "Modestly stepping aside can never be recommended as a continual practice in strong enough terms." The force of Walser's writing derives from this simultaneous valorization of irreducible individuality and of sameness, smallness,

interchangeability. In the most various terms, Walser praises monotony; it makes it wonderfully difficult to read his tone. When is he serious? When is he mocking the will to conformity? Susan Sontag has written that "The moral core of Walser's art is the refusal of power; of domination." And yet, paradoxically, part of the power of Walser's art lies in how that refusal of domination interacts with his narrators' demands to be dominated. Walser's voice is a strange mix of exuberance and submission, lyrical abandon and self-abnegation. His refusals are antiheroic, wavering; they reveal — sometimes comically, sometimes tragically — how the desire to be ruled enters the subject, the son, the servant, the pupil.

How can a writer refuse even the power of refusal, preserve his freedom while falling all over himself to give it away? Maybe the answer has to do with how Walser's singular sentences themselves "step aside": one of the most notable effects of his prose is how it seems to evaporate as you read. Walter Benjamin said of Walser's "garlands of language" that "each sentence has the sole purpose of rendering the previous one forgotten." This is not to say there aren't depths of meaning and memorable passages, but Walser's genius often involves a kind of disappearing act. W. G. Sebald has remarked that Walser's writing "has the tendency to dissolve upon reading, so that only a few hours later one can barely remember the ephemeral figures, events and things of which it spoke… Everything written in these incomparable books has — as their author might himself have said — a tendency to vanish into thin air." The content of Walser's sentences can vanish, I think, because Walser is often less concerned with recording the finished thought than with capturing the movement of a mind in the act of thinking; it's the motion that stays with you, not a stable set of meanings.

Perhaps this is why Walser was drawn to the conceit of schoolroom essays for his first book: Kocher is always worrying about managing his time, or running out of it, or having to force himself to write in the absence of an idea, allowing Walser to emphasize the present tense of composition. But even outside the schoolroom, Walser's other narrators frequently break off, interrupt themselves, or explode the fictional frame altogether: "In the bright, hot midday sun I would stop for a moment to rest under a fir, beech, or oak tree, stretching out on the moss or grass… But where am I? Am I actually on a hike right now? How is that possible?" Walser's digressive immediacy is as important as what his words denote. "The present time, surrounding you, singing and making noise, cannot," Fritz claims, "be put down in writing in any satisfactory way"—and yet that's precisely what Walser repeatedly accomplishes, registering the rhythms of the present in the action of his sentences. Fritz again: "It is

as though you could hear Thought itself softly whispering, softly stirring. It's like the scurrying of little white mice." Walser's sentences might declare the need for obedience, order, subservience, but those declarations are dissolved in the agitations of his syntax. If it's true, as Fritz says, that "Style is a sense of order," then we could say that a style that evaporates is a method of escape. The meanings of Walser's meandering sentences scurry away — right under the nose of the teacher or Inquisitor. The schoolchild is at that critical juncture where indoctrination intensifies, where pedagogy shades into penality, but the child nevertheless possesses unconquered territories of freedom and feeling whose topography Walser's sentences describe so beautifully even as they disappear.

It is often remarked that, although he wrote his greatest novels in the period leading up to the First World War, Walser's writing says very little about the disasters of his time. Nonetheless I find it impossible to separate the interplay of independence and conformity in Walser's work from the surpassing catastrophes of the twentieth century. (The last piece in this volume—"Hans"—was published in 1920, just four years before the world was introduced to Hans Castorp in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. At the end of Walser's story and Mann's novel, the two mercurial Hanses enlist.) In the short piece "In the Military"—Walser served in the Swiss National Guard — we again encounter a struggle between the values of refusal and obedience. "I am certainly a proponent of the slackard's life, laziness, happiness, and peace; but alas," writes the confused narrator, "I am also for the military. I think peace is nice and I think the military is nice." The military is nice, he explains, because it frees you from the obligation to think, and yet to "imagine a million-strong crowd of… individuals who dispense with the thinking of any halfway or entirely reasonable thoughts. Is this not a picture to instill horror?" However, the narrator declares, "I myself am one of those fellows who find it nice not to think. Also, I hold the principle of service in immensely high esteem." The schoolboy's mixture of flightiness and obsequiousness is also typical of Walser's soldiers: "Soldiers are a kind of children"—as is the narrator who thinks of war and peace in terms of niceness. It isn't glory or patriotic heroism that appeals to him: "Where else but in the military and as a simple, ready-and-rough soldier could one ever dare and take the liberty to devour an apple or, say, plum tart around eight at night, in lovely evening light, on a public small-town street, with unbounded delight and complete peace of mind?" It's both disturbing and funny to find a young man open to a military life because it might grant him permission to eat a cake at an odd hour in the open air — a young man who desires extreme regimentation only to recover a furtive liberty. One imagines Walser's

narrator having his dessert and then deserting. The quick shifts between ebullience and subjugation, between desiring a master and eluding his grasp — no matter how childish or parodic the temperament — inevitably evoke the imminent cataclysms of European fascism. Against this backdrop, Walser's evasive maneuvers, his Bartleby-like refusal of ambition, take on acute political significance: Walser's narrators humble themselves so thoroughly before authority that it can take the authoritarian a while to realize they've escaped.

— BEN LERNER

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THE PROSE in this book spans most of Robert Walser's career, from his first published story, "Greifen Lake" (1899), to "A Model Student" from the last book he published, *The Rose* (1925). I have drawn freely from the vast body of Walser's still-untranslated work, loosely guided by themes of beginnings and writing (schoolboys and diaries).

The collection is bookended with two longer pieces: first, the entire title sequence from Walser's first book, *Fritz Kocher's Essays* (1904). It was a stroke of genius for Walser to launch himself at the reading public in the guise of an "impish schoolboy soliloquist," in Christopher Middleton's fine phrase: Fritz Kocher, a fictional fellow in an old-fashioned frame narrative, dead in his youth and leaving to posterity only a collection of schoolboy writing exercises. Fritz turned out to be the perfect vehicle for Walser's unique energy, inventions, and oscillant ambiguities. The illustrations included here are the original drawings for the Fritz Kocher sequence by Walser's brother, Karl, a successful artist who often collaborated with Robert.

At the other end of *A Schoolboy's Diary* is "Hans," the story Walser put at the end of probably his most thoroughly worked and carefully composed collection, *Seeland* (*Lake Country*, published in 1920). He wrote to his publisher that he had "labored hard for a month and a half carefully going over every sentence in the book, which resulted in truly significant improvements in both form and content," and thus requested a higher than usual, though naturally still modest, fee ("especially since I am perhaps one of the most frugal authors who has ever existed").

The surprise ending of "Hans" raises the issue of Walser's relationship to the political events of his time. Hermann Hesse's praise for Walser is famous—"If he had a hundred thousand readers, the world would be a better place"—but much less well known are Hesse's previous sentence—"If writers such as Robert Walser were among the 'leading minds of our time,' there would be no war"—and the fact that these comments date from the height of World War I. It was in the same year, 1917, that Walser went to work on *Lake Country,* moved in part by what seems to be an almost utopian impulse: as he wrote to his publisher, "The title is sensuous and simple and, I would say, pan-European or indeed global. 'Lake Country' can be in Switzerland [Walser was from that region] or anywhere — in Australia, in Holland, or wherever else… I consider the title appropriate in every way because it sounds as simple and unassuming as it is sensuously vivid and vitally earthy. It seems to me both objective and also

colorful and charming. In short, it describes what the book is about: a region. And there is something magical in the sound of the word, '*Seeland*.'"

In "Hans," this dream of a common landscape comes to an abrupt end. Walser's relationship to war and peace was complex, as is also clear in the three autobiographical pieces about his military service and the numerous other stories included here containing glimpses of schoolboy violence. He was never as innocent as his narrative personas can often seem.

He was also by no means a naïve or accidental writer, an inexhaustible scribbler for the newspapers discovered as a real writer only after his death, much less the quasi — outsider artist he is sometimes presented as. He published ten collections of short prose during his active career (along with three novels, a book of poems, and a book of short plays), and quite consciously selected and shaped these ten volumes himself, with specific intentions that differed from book to book; he often revised pieces for book publication from their earlier newspaper versions. In short, he was a professional, and whether or not he chose to collect a piece into one of his books should make a difference in how we read it. In this collection, stories dated by years without months are the ones Walser published in book form, while dates with months refer to the publication date in a journal or newspaper. Both dates are given only when the book publication was significantly later than an earlier newspaper publication (for example, "July 1899; 1914" for "Greifen Lake," not collected in book form until 1914).

Christopher Middleton was Walser's first translator into any language, and his two selections of Walser's stories and translation of Walser's schoolboy novel, *Jakob von Gunten,* remain in print. Middleton's translations were my first, magnificent introduction to Walser's work. Susan Bernofsky has translated Walser's other three novels and four volumes of Walser's stories, and many other fine translators have published Walser translations in periodicals and small-press books, or in Middleton's *Selected Stories*. Almost all the pieces in *A Schoolboy's Diary* are previously untranslated, but the four Fritz Kocher essays translated by Bernofsky—"Autumn," "Careers," "The Fair," and "Music"—were needed for the complete series, and are included here in new translations. For thematic reasons I also included "Greifen Lake," "A Story," and "The Last Prose Piece" (previously translated by Bernofsky, the former as "Lake Greifen"), "The Rowboat" (previously translated by Tom Whalen, as "The Boat"), and "All Right Then" (previously translated by Mark Harman, as "Well Then"). I am adding my translations to the work of this distinguished company in the hope of further enriching English-language readers'

sense of Walser's remarkable range and voice. If Walser had a hundred thousand translators, the world would be a better place.

— DAMION SEARLS

A SCHOOLBOY'S DIARY AND OTHER STORIES

PART I. FRITZ KOCHER'S ESSAYS

"Fritz Kocher's Essays — Relayed by Robert Walser"

INTRODUCTION

THE BOY who wrote these essays passed away not long after he left school. I had some difficulty convincing his mother, a dear and honorable lady, to allow me to publish them. She was understandably very attached to these pages, which must have been a bittersweet reminder of her son. Only after I promised to have the essays published unchanged, just as her little Fritz had written them, did she finally agree. The essays may seem unboyish in many places, and all too boyish in others. But please keep in mind that my hand has not altered them anywhere. A boy can speak words of great wisdom and words of great stupidity at practically the same moment: that is how these essays are too. I bade farewell to the boy's mother as politely and gratefully as I could. She told me all sorts of qualities in the little fellow's life that nicely overlap with the qualities of the schoolwork presented here. He was destined to die young, the jolly, serious laugher. It was not granted to his surely large and sparkling eyes to see anything of the wider world he so longed to reach. On the other hand, he was able to see clearly, in his way, as the reader will surely agree when he reads these essays. Farewell, my little friend! Farewell, reader!

MAN

Man is a sensitive creature. He has only two legs, but one heart, where an army of thoughts and feelings frolics. Man could be compared to a well laid out pleasure garden, if our teacher permitted such innuendoes. Now and then Man writes poetry, and when he is in this highest and noblest condition he is called a Poet. If we were all the way we should be, namely the way God has told us to be, we would be infinitely happy. Alas we abandon ourselves to useless passions that undermine our well-being only too soon and put an end to our happiness. Man should stand above his fellow creature, the animal, in all things. But even a foolish schoolboy can see people acting like irrational animals every day. Drunkenness is as hideous as a picture: Why do people indulge in it? It must be because from time to time they feel the need to drown their reason in the dreams that swim in every kind of alcohol. Such cowardice is fitting for a thing as imperfect as Man. We are imperfect in everything. Our inadequacy extends to every task we undertake and which would be so splendid if it didn't proceed from mere greed. Why must we be this way? I drank a glass of beer once, but I will never drink another one again. Where will it lead? To noble endeavors? Certainly not. I promise loud and clear: I want to be a steady, upright person. Let all great and beautiful things find in me as ardent an imitator as fierce a protector. Secretly, I love art. But it's not a secret anymore, not since right now, because now I've been careless and blabbed it. Let me be punished for that and made an example of. What makes a noble way of thinking not want to freely admit itself? Nothing less than a whipping in view, that's for sure. What is a whipping? A scarecrow to frighten slaves and dogs! Only one specter scares me: baseness. Oh, I want to climb as high as is granted to any man. I want to be famous. I want to meet beautiful women and love them and be loved and petted by them. Even so, I will not give up any of my elemental power (creative power), instead I want to and I will get stronger, freer, nobler, richer, more famous, braver, and more reckless every day. I'm sure I'll get an F for writing like this. But I say this is the best essay I've ever written. Every word comes from the heart. How beautiful it is, after all, to have a quaking, sensitive, choosy heart. That is the best thing about a person. A person who does not know how to preserve his heart is unwise, because he is robbing himself of an endless source of sweet inexhaustible strength, a wealth in which he exceeds all the creatures on earth, a fullness, a warmth that, if he wants to remain human, he will never be able to do without. A person with a heart is not only the best person but also the most intelligent person, since he has something that no mere bustling cleverness can give him. I repeat once again: I never want to get drunk; I don't want to look forward to meals, since that's beastly; I want to pray and, even more, work, since it seems to me that work is

already a prayer; I want to be industrious and obey whoever deserves to be obeyed. Parents and teachers deserve it automatically. That's my essay.

AUTUMN

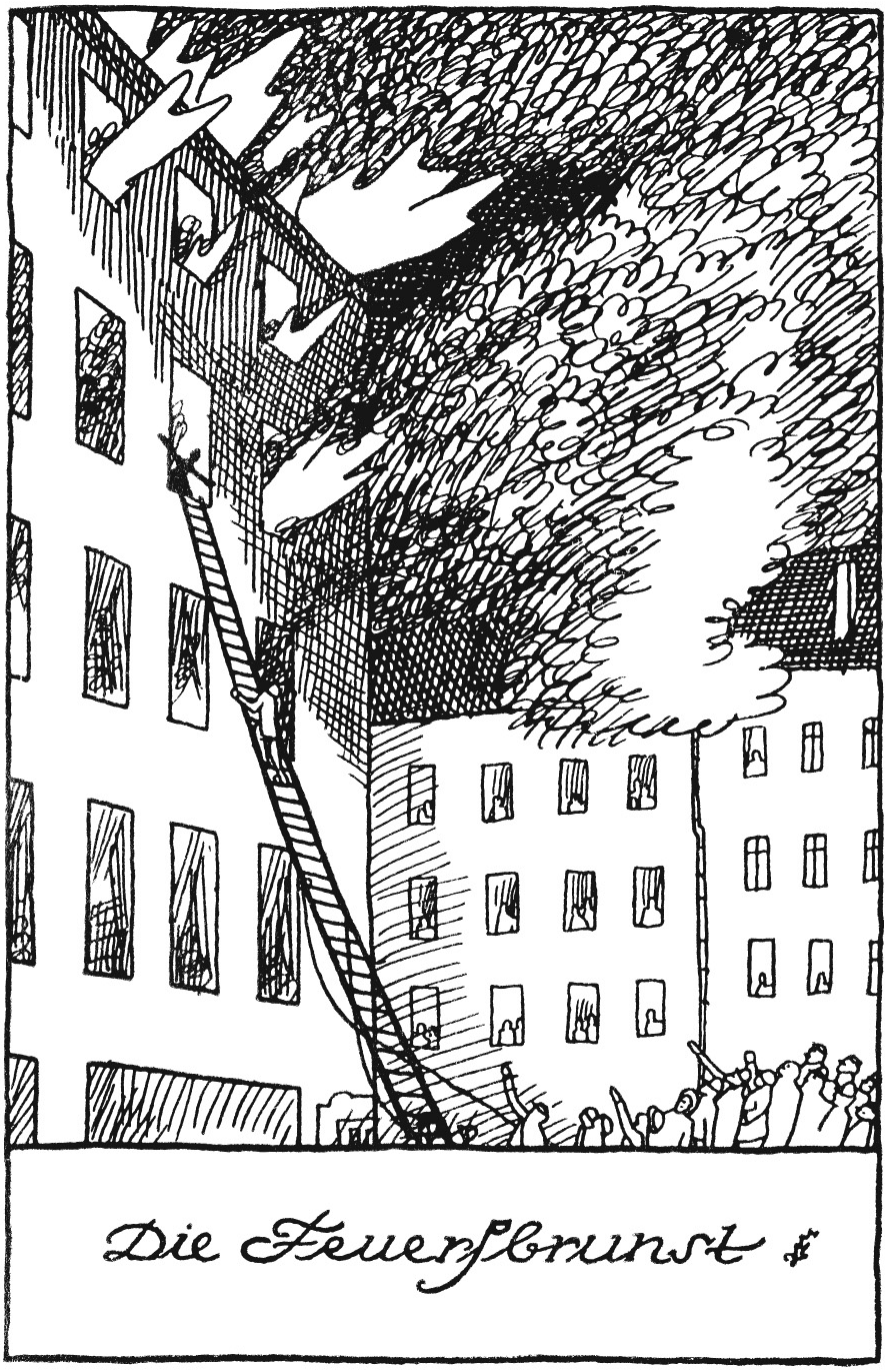
When Autumn comes, the leaves fall off of the trees onto the ground. Actually, I should say it like this: When the leaves fall, Autumn is here. I have to work on improving my style. Last time the teacher wrote: Style, wretched. It's upsetting but there's nothing I can do about it. I like Autumn. The air is fresher, the things on the earth look different all of a sudden, the mornings sparkle and are very beautiful and the nights are so wonderfully chilly. And still we take walks until very late. The mountain above the city is beautifully colored and it makes you sad when you think that these colors signal the general colorlessness to come. Soon the snow will be flying. I love snow too, even if it's not so nice to wade around in it too long with cold wet feet. But why else are there warm felt slippers and heated rooms for later? Only the poor children tug at my heartstrings — I know they have no warm rooms in their houses. How horrible it must be to sit around and freeze. I wouldn't do any homework, I would die, yes, stubbornly die out of spite, if I was poor. How the trees look now! Their branches pierce the gray air like thin, sharply pointed daggers; you can see the ravens you never see at any other time. You don't hear any birds singing anymore. Nature really is great. The way it shifts colors, changes robes, puts on masks and takes them off again! It's very beautiful. If I was a painter, and it's not out of the question that I'll become one someday, since after all no one knows what their destiny may be, I would be most fervently an Autumn painter. I'm only afraid that my colors wouldn't be up to it. Maybe I still don't understand it enough. And anyway, why should I worry at all about something that hasn't even happened yet? Only the present moment should and must concern me deeply. Where did I hear that? I must have heard it somewhere, maybe from my older brother, who is in college. It will be Winter soon, the snow will swirl, oh how I'm looking forward to that! When everything outside is so white, everything in class is so right. Colors fill up your mind too much with all sorts of muddled stuff. Colors are too sweet a muddle, nothing more. I love things in one color, monotonous things. Snow is such a monotonous song. Why shouldn't a color be able to make the same impression as singing? White is like a murmuring, whispering, praying. Fiery colors, like for instance Autumn colors, are a shriek. Green in midsummer is a many-voiced song with all the highest notes. Is that true? I don't know if that's right. Well, the teacher will surely

be so kind as to correct it. — How everything in the world keeps going! Now it's almost Christmas, then it's just a short step to New Year's, only a few more to Spring, and everything keeps moving forward step by step like that. You'd have to be crazy to try to count all the steps. I don't like math. I'm bad at it even though my grades are pretty good. I will never go into business, I can feel that. I only hope my parents don't try to apprentice me to a businessman! I would run away, and then what would they have? But have I said enough here about Autumn? I went on a lot about snow. That'll get me a good grade on my report card this quarter. Grades are a stupid invention. In singing I get an A and I don't make a single sound. How does that happen? It would be better if they gave us apples instead of grades. But then it's true they would have to hand out way too many apples. Oh!

THE FIRE

A lonely wanderer strides across the pitch-black field. The stars shining above him are his only companions. He walks sunk in thought, suddenly he notices overhead a dark red in the sky. He stops and stays still, thinks a moment, and turns back toward the city on the path he has just walked: He knows that a fire has broken out. He walks faster but is too far away from the city to get there one two three. We will leave him scurrying along and look to see how the inhabitants of the city are reacting to the fire that has so terrifyingly broken out in their midst. A man is hurrying through the quiet streets and waking up all the sleepers with numerous blows on his horn. Everyone recognizes the unique, ghastly sound of the fire horn. Everyone who is able to jump up jumps up, throws some clothes on, rubs his eyes, pulls himself together, takes to his feet, and rushes through the streets, which by now are full of people, to the site of the fire. It is to be found on the main street, and is one of the most important buildings in the community. The fire is spreading wildly. It is as though it had a hundred slippery, volatile arms reaching out in all directions. The fire department has not yet arrived. Fire departments are slow everywhere, but especially in our city. But now it would really be better if it came, the situation is getting scary. This fire, which, like all savage elements, has no rational mind, is acting totally crazy. Why are the human hands to rein it in not yet near? Must people be at their laziest on just such a terrible night as this? There are a lot of people standing on the square. It's true, I'm there and the teacher is there and everyone in our class. Everyone gawks in amazement. — Now, finally, the firemen, looking half asleep, arrive and start performing their duties. These consist for the time being of running back and forth and

shouting back and forth in a totally useless way. Why all that screaming? A firm command and silent obedience — that would really be much better. The fire has turned into a raging fire. Why did they have to give it enough time to become a raging fire? It devours, it tears, it hisses, it rages, it is like a glowing red-colored drunkard smashing and destroying everything it can get its hands on. The house is ruined in any case. All the beautiful valuable things lying piled up inside it burn: just as long as no people perish. But it almost looks like the most terrible thing has come to pass. A girl's voice cries out from the smoke and fiery blaze. You poor girl! Her mother, down in the street, faints. A traveling salesman catches her. Oh, if only I were big and strong! How I'd like to defy the flames and leap as a heroic savior to the aid of the girl! Are there no heroes anywhere in sight? Now would be the chance to reveal what a brave and courageous person you are. But wait, what's that? A thin young man in shabby clothing has already mounted the rungs of a tall ladder and is climbing ever higher, into the smoke, into the blaze, now he's terrifyingly visible again for a moment and now he disappears again and then he turns — oh, the sight! — with the girl in one arm and he comes back down the ladder carefully holding on with the other arm and he gives the mother, who has meanwhile recovered somewhat, back her daughter, who is practically smothered with hugs and kisses. What a moment! Oh, if only I could have been that good brave man! Oh, to be such a man, to become such a man! The house burns down to the ground. On the street, mother and daughter hold each other in their arms, and the man who saved her has vanished without a trace.



“The Fire”

FRIENDSHIP

What a precious flower friendship is. Without it, even the

strongest man could not live long. The heart needs a kindred, familiar heart, like a little clearing in the forest, a place to rest and lie down and chat. We can never value our friend highly enough, if he is a true friend, and can never run away fast enough if he betrays our friendship. O, there are false friends, whose only goal in life is to wound, to hurt, to destroy! There are people who zealously strive to seem to be our friends, only so that they can injure and damage us all the more thoughtlessly and deeply. I don't actually know any friends like that, but I have read about them in books, and what it says in them must be true since it is written in such a clear and heartfelt way. I have one friend, I would rather not say his name. It is enough that I am certain of him as mine, completely mine. Where is the happiness, the calm, the enjoyment that can compare to this? I don't know of any. Any such calm I mean. My friend is surely thinking of me during this hour of class, as surely as I am thinking of him and mentioning him. In his essay I am playing the leading role as much as he, the good fellow, is playing the leading role here in mine. Oh, such clear communication, such a firm bond, such mutual understanding! I cannot begin to understand it, but I let it happen all the more calmly since it is good and I like it. My unpracticed pen cannot express how good it is, how much I like it. There are many varieties of friendship, just as there are many varieties of betrayal. You should not confuse one with another. You should think it over. There are some who want to cheat and deceive us, but they can't, and others who want to stay true to us for all eternity but they have to betray us, half consciously, half against their will. Still others betray us just to show us that we were deceived when we thought they were our friends. I like that kind of enemy. They teach us something and leave us with nothing to trouble us except the disappointment. Still, that is very troubling! Who would not want a friend he could both love and admire! Both — love and admiration — are indispensable feelings for true friendship. You can love a toy without admiring it. In fact you can even love things you despise. But you cannot love and at the same time have a low opinion of a friend. It's impossible, at least that's how it seems to me. Mutual respect is the only soil in which such a tender plant can grow. I would rather be hated than despised, and rather not be loved than be loved the way you are when someone despises you at the same time. Nothing offends a noble creature more than contempt. A noble creature has only other noble creatures as friends, and noble friends tell you when they can no longer respect you. Thus true friendship is a school for fine and beautiful character. And to practice such behavior is a pleasure greater than ten other pleasures, even a hundred. Oh, I am all too aware of the sweet delights of noble friendship. One more thing: Funny, silly people have a hard time making friends. People

don't trust them. And if they mock and criticize, they don't deserve to be trusted either.

POVERTY

Someone is poor when he comes to school in a torn jacket. Who would deny that? We have several poor boys in our class. They wear tattered clothes, their hands freeze, they have dirty faces that are not beautiful and unclean behavior. The teacher treats them more roughly than us, and he is right to. Teachers know what they're doing. I wouldn't want to be poor, I'd be ashamed to death. Why is being poor such a disgrace? I don't know. My parents are well off. Papa has a carriage and horses. He couldn't have them if he was poor. I see poor, ragged women on the street all the time and I feel sorry for them. Poor men, on the other hand, produce a kind of indignation in me. Poverty and dirt doesn't look good on men and I have no sympathy for a poor man. I have a kind of special liking for poor women. They can ask for money so beautifully. Men who beg are ugly and ashamed and so it's right to loathe them. There is nothing uglier than begging. Every kind of begging is a sign of an unreliable, unproud, yes even dishonest character. I would rather die on the spot than open my mouth to make an improper request. There are some requests that are prouder and more beautiful than anything in the world: asking someone you love for forgiveness after you have offended them. For example: your mother. Admitting your mistake and making up for it with humble, modest behavior could not be farther from contemptible, in fact it is necessary. To beg for bread or for help is bad. Why do there have to be poor people with nothing to eat? I think for someone to approach his fellow man for food or clothing is not dignified. Being needy is as horrible as it is contemptible. My teacher laughs at my essays, and when he reads this one he will laugh twice as hard. So what! To be poor? Does that mean not to own anything? Yes, and property is necessary for life, just like breathing for running. If you run out of breath you fall down on the street and other people have to run to help you! There is one good thing about poverty, I've read in books, that it awakens charity in the minds of the rich. But I say, since after all I have a voice of my own and this is my essay, that it only makes them hard and cruel. The consciousness in the hearts of the rich people who see other people suffering and know that it is in their power to improve their situations makes them arrogant. My father is gentle and kind, cheerful and just, but to poor people he is hard and snappy and not at all gentle. He screams at them and you can tell that they irritate and annoy him. He talks about them with disgust and with hate mixed in. No, poverty has no good

consequences. It makes most people sad and unfriendly. So I don't like the poor boys in our class, because I can tell that they envy my nice clothes and are happy to see me do anything wrong in class. They could never be my friends. I don't feel anything for them, because I pity them. I don't respect them, because they see me as an enemy for no reason. And if they do have a reason — well, unfortunately time's up.

SCHOOL

"On the Value and Necessity of School" says the topic on the blackboard. I would argue that school is useful. It holds me between its iron or wooden claws (school benches) six to eight hours a day and keeps my mind from degenerating into slovenliness. I have to study, that is excellent. It prepares me for the public life that stands before me: that is even better. It exists, and I love and honor facts. I am happy to go to school and happy to leave it. That's the best variety a useless rascal could ask for. In school, a measuring stick is laid alongside everyone's knowledge. Now everyone is in the same boat. The poorest kid has the right to be richest in knowledge and ability. No one, not even the teacher, can prevent him from standing out. Everyone has respect for him when he shines; everyone is ashamed of himself when he doesn't know something. In my opinion that is a nice arrangement, to spur ambition and let you court the admiration of your classmates. I am terribly ambitious. Nothing delights my soul as much as the feeling I get when I surprise my teacher with a clever answer. I know that I'm one of the best students but I constantly tremble at the thought that someone even smarter could catch up to me or surpass me. This thought is as hot and exciting as Hell. That is the most useful thing about school: It tires you out, upsets you, gets you going, it nourishes the imagination, it is the anteroom, the waiting room as it were, of life. Nothing that exists is useless. School the least of all. Only lazy students, who are often punished as a result, could come up with that idea. In fact I'm surprised we were even given this as a topic at all. Schoolboys cannot actually talk about the value of school and need for school when they're still stuck in it themselves. Older people should write about things like that. The teacher himself, for instance, or my father, who I think is a wise man. The present time, surrounding you, singing and making noise, cannot be put down in writing in any satisfactory way. You can blabber all kinds of nonsense, but it's a real question whether the mishmash you write (I allow myself the bad manners of describing my work in this way) actually says and means anything. I like school. Anything forced on me, whose necessity has been mutely insisted upon from every

side, I try to approach obligingly, and like it. School is the unavoidable choker around the neck of youth, and I confess that it is a valuable piece of jewelry indeed. What a burden we would be to our parents, workers, passersby, shop owners, if we didn't have to go to school! What would we spend our time doing, if not homework! Playing tricks ends up being pretty exhausting after all. It's impossible to go for a walk without taking the opportunity to play a trick somewhere or another. Yes, really, school is a nice arrangement. I do not in any way regret going to school, instead I celebrate it from the bottom of my heart. Every smart and truth-loving schoolboy would have to say the same thing, or something along the same lines. It's pointless to talk about the value of something necessary, everything necessary is valuable automatically.

POLITENESS

Nothing would be more boring than people not being polite to each other. Politeness is a delight, for civilized people, and the degree and type of politeness a person shows is like a mirror reflecting his true nature. It would be horrible if people walked right past each other without saying hello, or if you did not have to take off your hat when you walked into a room, or if you could turn your back on parents and teachers while they were talking to you. It would probably be practically unbearable. Without manners there would be no society and without society there would be no life. No question about it: If there were only two or three hundred people living scattered all over the world, manners would not be necessary, but we live so close together, practically on top of each other, that we would not survive a single day without proper rules for getting along. And how amusing they are, these rules that you have to submit to if you want to be a person among other people! There is not one single rule or regulation that lacks its charm. In the kingdom of manners, everything tingles with delicate, dainty little corridors, streets, bottlenecks, and twists and turns. There are spine-chilling abysses there too, more spine-chilling than up in the mountains. How easy it is to fall in, if you're careless or awkward; on the other hand, how safe you are keeping to the narrow paths when you obediently pay attention. Of course you have to keep your eyes and ears and senses open, otherwise you'll definitely fall. I feel that manners are almost something delightful. I often walk up and down the street hoping to meet someone my parents know so that I can greet him. I don't actually know if the way I doff my hat is gracious. It's enough that it makes me happy just to do it. And it's nice when grown-ups give you a friendly greeting too. How glorious it is to doff your hat to a lady

and be tenderly glanced at by her eyes. Ladies have such kind eyes, and nodding their heads is an extremely lovely way to thank you for such a minor expenditure of labor as raising your hat. Teachers should be greeted from a distance. But it's proper for teachers to greet you back if you greet them. They only sink in their students' estimation if they think that they can show their dignity by being rude. Manners are irrespective of age differences, they are simply sufficient unto themselves. If you are not a polite person you will not be polite to anyone, and if you like being polite then you will like being so to everyone that much more. The more big and important a polite person is, the more benevolence his civility has. To be greeted in a friendly fashion by a great and influential man is a true pleasure. Even great people must have once been small, and the best way they can show that they are now great is with kind and gentle behavior. Anyone with a heart is polite. The heart discovers the finest forms of politeness. You can tell when a person has the seat of their politeness somewhere other than in their heart. You can learn manners, but it is hard if you don't have a talent for it, in other words the heartfelt wish to have the good manners. No one has to be polite, but easy and unforced good behavior is necessarily a part of anyone's well-being.

NATURE

It is hard to write about Nature, especially for someone in grade A-2. Writing about people is easy: they have fixed characteristics. But Nature is so blurry, so delicate, so intangible, so infinite. Still I'll try. I like wrestling with difficult things. It makes your blood surge around in your veins and arteries and excites the senses. Nothing is impossible, I have heard it said somewhere or another. That may be a slightly superficial way to put it, but a streak of truth and fact runs through these words. I went for a walk in the mountains with my brother, the college student. It was in winter, two weeks before Christmas. The mountain is broad as an athlete's shoulders. It was lightly covered with snow, as if a sensitive, careful hand had strewn it. Delicate little spikes of grass poked out, which was a very pretty sight. The air was full of mist and sun. The blue sky was lightly transparent everywhere — softly, lightly. We daydreamed while we walked. At the top, we sat down on a bench and enjoyed the view. A view like that is the most splendid and liberating thing in the world. Our gaze went down into the valleys and out into the farthest distance, only to tarry in the closest nearness the next moment. You look calmly at the fields, meadows, and mountainsides stretched out at your feet, as though lifeless, or asleep. Mist steals through the narrow valleys and the wide valleys, the forests dream, the roofs of the city sparkle blurrily,

everything is a soft, pleasant, big silent dream. Now it looks like the rolling waves of the ocean, now like a cute little toy, now like something infinitely clear again, something that has suddenly become clear. I can't think of the words for it. Neither of us wanted to interrupt the beautiful Sunday mountain silence. The bells tolled richly from the depths. It seemed to me that they were ringing very close to me, right next to my ears, and then a moment later it seemed to me that they had fallen silent and I could no longer perceive them with my weak hearing. We spoke softly, when we eventually spoke. About art. My brother said that it was a lot harder to play Karl in *The Robbers* than the villain, Franz, and I had to agree with him when he told me his reasons for saying so. My brother is an excellent painter, poet, singer, piano player, and gymnast. He is very, very talented. I love him, and not only because he is my brother. He is my friend. He wants to be a choirmaster, but really he would rather not be a choirmaster, he would rather be something that brings together all the arts in the world. One thing for sure, he wants to make something of himself. — We went home when the time came when you have to go home, as it always does. The snow gleamed as it fell off the early fir trees. We said that the firs looked marvelously beautiful, like noble, aristocratic women. Here I can see a smile floating over my teacher's lips. The memory of that Sunday morning walk still floats over me — of the white, dreamy, light-blue view from the bench, of the conversation about art, and of… There's the bell.

OPEN TOPIC

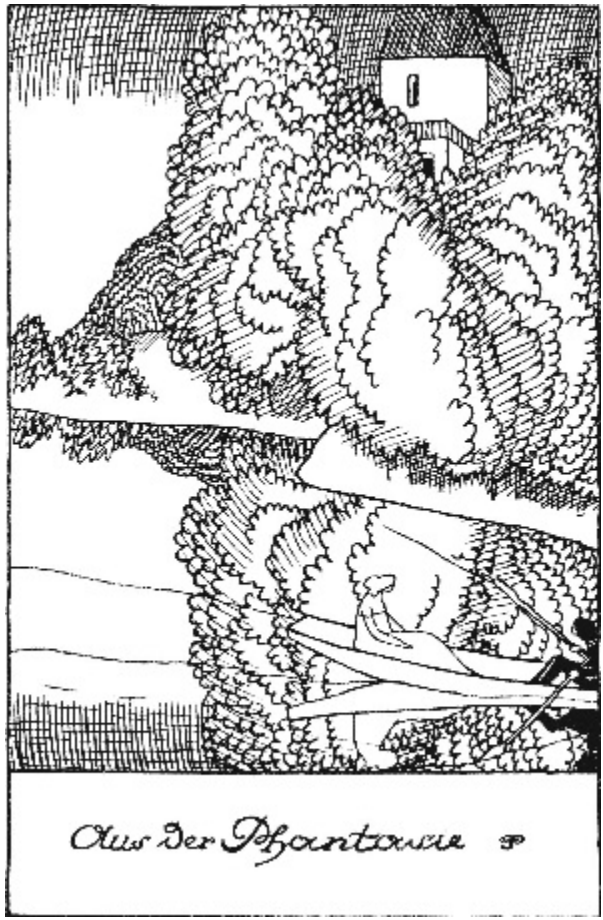
This time, the teacher said, each of you can write whatever comes to mind. To be honest, nothing comes to mind. I don't like this kind of freedom. I am happy to be tied to a set subject. I am too lazy to think of something myself. And what would it be? I'm equally happy to write about anything. I don't like hunting around for a topic, I like looking for beautiful, delicate words. I can come up with ten, even a hundred ideas from one idea, but the original idea never comes to me. What do I know. I write because it's nice to fill up the lines with pretty little letters like this. The "what" makes no difference to me at all. — Aha, I've got it. I will try to give a description of our schoolroom. No one has ever done that before. I'll definitely get an Excellent for that. — When I raise my head and look out over the many schoolboy heads around me, I cannot help but laugh. It is so mysterious, so strange, so bizarre. It is like a sweetly humming fairy tale. To think that every one of those heads is full of diligent, frolicking, racing thoughts is mysterious enough. Writing class may be the most lovely, attractive time for just this reason. No other class

time goes by so noiselessly, so worshipfully, and with everyone working so quietly on their own. It is as though you could hear Thought itself softly whispering, softly stirring. It's like the scurrying of little white mice. Now and then a fly rises up and then softly sinks back down onto a head to relax on a single hair. The teacher sits at his desk like a hermit between high cliffs. The blackboards are black, unfathomable lakes. The gaps between them are the white foam of the waves. The hermit is completely sunk in thoughts and reflections. Nothing that happens anywhere in the world, i.e., in the schoolroom, touches him. Now and then he gives his scalp a luxurious scratch. I know what a sensual pleasure it is to scratch your head. You stir up countless ideas that way. It doesn't look especially nice, that's true, but anyway, not everything can look nice. The teacher is a short, frail, feeble man. I've heard it said that men like that are the smartest and most learned. That may well be true. I am firmly convinced that this teacher is infinitely smart. I wouldn't want to bear the burden of his knowledge. If it's unseemly to write that, please keep in mind that it is absolutely necessary for a portrait of our schoolroom. The teacher is very excitable. He often flies into a terrible rage when a schoolboy makes him angry by not being able to do something. That's wrong. Why get excited about something as minor as a schoolboy being lazy? But actually I'm not one to talk. If I had to be in his place, I might have an even shorter temper. You need a very special kind of talent to be a teacher. To keep your dignity faced with rascals like us all day long requires a lot of willpower. All things considered our teacher has good self-control. He has a gentle, intelligent way of telling stories, which you can't give him enough credit for. He is very properly dressed, and it's true that we laugh behind his back a lot. A back is always a little ridiculous. There's nothing you can do about it. He wears high boots, as though just returning from the Battle of Austerlitz. These boots that are so grand, only the spurs are missing, give us a lot to think about. The boots are practically bigger than he is. When he's really mad, he stamps his feet with them. I'm not very happy with my portrait.

FROM THE IMAGINATION

We're supposed to write something from our imagination. My imagination likes brightly colored things, like fairy tales. I don't like dreaming about chores and homework. What's all around you is for thinking, what's far away is for dreaming. — On the lake whose waves beat against the outermost houses in our city, a noble lady and a noble lad are floating in a small rowboat. The lady is dressed in extremely luxurious and valuable clothing, the boy more humbly. He is her page.

He rows, then he lifts up the oars and lets drops of water fall like pearls into the great, recumbent water. It is quiet, wonderfully quiet. The large lake lies there as still as a puddle of oil. The sky is in the lake, and the lake looks like a watery, deep sky. Both of them, the lake and the sky, are a softly dreaming blue, a blue. Both of them, the noble lady and the noble lad, are dreaming. Now the boy calmly rows a bit farther out, but as quietly, as slowly, as if he were afraid to move any farther. It's more like floating than gliding, and more like being quiet and not moving than gliding. The lady is smiling at the boy the whole time. She must like him very much. The boy smiles under her smile. It is morning, one of those lake mornings with a kiss of sunshine. The sun blazes down onto the lake, the rowboat, both people, onto their happiness, onto everything. Everything is happy. Even the colors on the beautiful lady's clothes are happy. Colors must have feelings too. Colors are lovely and they go well with happiness. The lady is from the castle rising up on the right-hand shore of the lake, its towers glittering. She is a countess. At her behest the boy has untied the little boat and rowed out to where they are now: almost in the middle of the lake. The lady holds her white hand in the greenish, bluish water. The water is warm. It *kisses* the offered hand. It has a real wet mouth for kissing. The white walls of the scattered country houses shimmer toward them from the shore. The brown vineyards are beautifully reflected in the water, the country houses too. Obviously! The one has to be reflected just as much as the other. Nothing gets special treatment. Everything that makes the shoreline lively with shape and color is subject to the lake, which does with it whatever it wants. It mirrors it. It, the lake, is the magician, the lord, the fairy tale, the picture. — The rowboat glides across this deep, watery, undulating picture. Always the same calm floating. We have already described it, even if we have not said enough. We? Good grief, am I speaking in the plural? That's a habit authors have, and whenever I write essays I always feel like a real author. But the lake, the boat, the waves, the lady, the boy, and the oar can't fade away quite yet. I want to look at them one more time. The lady is sweet and beautiful. I don't know any ladies who aren't sweet and beautiful. This one, though, in such charmingly sweet surroundings transfigured with sun and colors, is especially so. Plus of course she's also a distinguished countess from bygone times. The boy is a figure from an earlier century too. There aren't pages anymore. Our era no longer needs them. The lake, on the other hand, is the very same lake. The same blurry distances and colors as back then shine across it *now*, and the same sun. The castle still stands too, but it's empty.



CAREERS

Anyone who wants to lead an upstanding life in this world needs a career. You can't just work your way along. Work has to have a particular character and a goal it is aiming toward. To reach that goal, you choose a profession. This happens when a person leaves school, at which point that person is an adult, or in other words, now he has another school he has to attend: life. Life is a strict schoolmaster, they tell you, and it must be true if it is such a universal opinion. We can choose whatever we want as our profession, and anywhere we can't do that, it is an injustice. There are all kinds of jobs I'd like. That makes it hard to choose one. I think the best thing to do would be take up some profession or another, maybe the first one that comes along, try it out, and, when I've had enough of it, toss it aside. For is it even possible to know how things will look from inside a given job? It seems to me that you have to live it first. Inexperienced minds, like ours, cannot be faced with a choice without making spectacular fools

of themselves. It's really something for parents to do, choosing a career for you. They know what's right for you better than anyone. And if something other than what they've decided on for our lives turns out to suit us better, there's always time to change saddles later. You don't sink to the level of a saddler. No, it is rarely unfair to us, whatever they do. — Well, I'd like to be captain of a ship. But I wonder if my parents would agree. They love me very much and they would be worried about me if they knew I was exposed to the ocean's storms. The best thing to do would naturally be to run away in secret — at night, out through the window, down a rope, and goodbye forever. But no! I don't have the courage to trick my parents, and who knows if I even have what it takes to be a ship's captain. I don't want to be a locksmith, a joiner, or a carpenter. Such manual labor is not suited to an essayist of my caliber. A bookbinder would be nice, but my parents would not allow it, since I know they think I'm much too good for that. As long as they don't make me go to university, I would go crazy there. I have no desire to be a doctor, no talent to be a pastor, no stick-to-itiveness to be a lawyer or a teacher… I'd rather die. Our teachers, in any case, are all unhappy, you can tell just by looking at them. I'd like to be a forest ranger. I would build myself a little house overgrown with ivy at the edge of the forest and wander around in the forest all day until late at night. Maybe that would start to seem boring to me too eventually and I would long for the big fancy cities. As a poet I would want to live in Paris, as a musician in Berlin, as a businessman nowhere. Just stick me in an office and see what happens. Well there's one other thing I have in my soul: It would be great to join the circus. A famous tightrope walker, sparklers on my back, the stars above me, an abyss to either side, and just a slender, delicate path to walk before me. — A clown? I do feel that I have some talent for joking around. But my parents would be hurt if they knew I was onstage with a long nose painted red and flour sprinkled on my cheeks and wearing a wide, ridiculous suit. — Well, then what? Stay home and whine? Not that, never. One thing for sure, I'm not worried about finding a career. There are so many of them.

THE FATHERLAND

Our form of government is a republic. We are allowed to do whatever we want. We can act as free and easy as we feel like. We don't have to account for our behavior to anyone but ourselves, and that is our pride. Our honor, though, is the limits we place on our actions. Other countries stare in wonder at us, amazed that we can govern ourselves with nothing but our own power. We are not subject to anyone or anything except our own judgment and our upright

character, whose orders and guidance we are happy to receive. We have no place for king or kaiser. The streets of our cities were not built for princely processions to march through, our houses are no pigsties but not palaces either. Our churches have no pomp and splendor and our city halls are simple and proud. Our mentality is like our homes, simple and prosperous; our hearts are like our landscapes: rough, but not infertile. We carry ourselves like members of a republic, citizens, warriors, human beings. The subjects in other countries often look like house pets. I don't mean that freedom and pride are not native to other peoples as well, but with us they are inborn. Our forefathers, the brave confederators, bequeathed us their mentality, and it would be tragic if we were anything other than true to their magnificent gift. I feel a sacred serious feeling when I write these words. I am an ardent believer in the Republic. Young as I am, I already want to eagerly serve my fatherland. I am writing this essay with trembling fingers. I only hope that it will please the fatherland to claim my services and abilities soon. But I forget that I am still a boy in grade A-2. How I long to escape from this stifling youth and enter into public life with its great demands, tempests, ideas, and actions. I lie here as though in chains. I feel like a mature, intelligent adult, and then I look in the mirror and what I see stuns me with its youth and insignificance. Oh, if I ever make it that far, I will serve my fatherland with the most sacred fervor, and take pride in being permitted to serve it, and not get tired from whatever tasks it sees fit to assign me. It needs my abilities — my whole life. Why else did my parents give me it (life)? You are not really alive if you're not living for something, and what other good is it nobler and more glorious to fight and live for than the good of the homeland? I am glad I still have such a wonderful life ahead of me. The fatherland is large, but to be able to do my part to help make it even larger will be my pride, my life, my desire, my honor. Oh, I have boundless aspirations, all the more so since I know that this kind of ambition is not a shameful, ignoble urge. It is still possible to be a hero, even today. Heroism looks different now, that's all. When it comes to the greatness, fame, and advancement of the fatherland, it is no superfluous thing to be a hero, a sacrificer. Oh, but I still a schoolboy in grade A-2.

MY MOUNTAIN

It gets its name, Bözingenberg, from the village that lies at its southwestern foot. It is high but you can still climb it easily. We climb it a lot, my classmates and I, because the best places to play are up there. It is wide, probably an hour, no, much wider than that. I actually have no idea since I have never measured its whole width. It

would take me too far out of my way. When you see it from another mountain, sitting there in all its height and width, it looks like a sleeping magician. Its form has the shape of an elephant's head. I don't know if that's exactly right. In any case, since it's only a beautiful mountain, it doesn't really make any difference what it looks like. And it is the best mountain, with the best view. From the top you can see three white lakes, lots of other mountains, plains in three directions, cities and villages, forests, and all of it so beautiful down in the distant valleys, as though spread out just for you to look at. From up there, studying geography and lots of other things too is a pleasure. But for us the most beautiful things are the mighty beech trees on the mountainside. In spring their leaves are a wonderfully bright and wet green, almost fresh enough to eat. Frisky brown horses leap around in its meadows. You can walk right up close to them without being afraid. You just have to trust horses. There are goats and cows, too, but they're not as exciting. A classmate of mine once grabbed a cow by the tail and it dragged him halfway down the mountain. We were scared for him, but still we had to laugh. When we play we often get into arguments, sometimes even fights. I like the latter more than the former. I hate arguments but it's fun and exciting to hit. I like to feel hot with my blood pumping. Sometimes our game degenerates into a crazy battle. A battle is tremendous, and the hero in a battle is even more splendid. Of course you're mad afterward, there's anger, hate, enmity. But at least those are all clear feelings. Nothing is drier than dryness and there's nothing more important to me than being dry and aloof. If there's hate in the air I like to be the mediator and calm everybody down. I can play that role too. Playing shouldn't get out of control and degenerate into fistfights. There, now I've said the right thing, even though I myself am a first-class giver and receiver of punches when it comes to that. Well, let's move on. It's easier to give fine warnings (to give yourself fine warnings) than it is to avoid being bad and sinning in the given moment. Everything at its proper time. So, fighting and throwing stones at its, and good intentions at its. It's important to know every side. But I've almost forgotten about my mountain. I have spent so many beautiful mornings, evenings, and even nights on it that it's hard for me to picture and put down on paper one single time. Once I spent an evening up there. I was lying in the grass by myself under century-old fir trees and dreaming. The sun cast its glow down on me and on the meadow. Bells and railroad noises rose up from the lowlands. I felt like I was far, far away from the whole world. I didn't look at anything, I just let myself be looked at. At least that's what a squirrel did for a long time. It peeked down at me scared and confused. I let it do what it wanted. Shrewmice were jumping from rock to rock, the sun went down, and the meadow

glowed in the dark, transparent shadows. Oh, the longing I felt in my heart. If only I knew what for.

OUR CITY

Our city is actually more like a beautiful big park than a city. The streets are garden paths. They look so clean, as if strewn with fine sand. The mountain with its dark firs and green leaves rises up over the roofs of the city. We have the most magnificent sights, including a boulevard that they say Napoleon built. I don't think he actually planted the trees with his own hands, he was probably too proud for that, too mighty. In summer, the big old chestnut trees cast wonderful refreshing shadows. On summer evenings, you can see the residents of this city who like to take walks strolling up and down the boulevard. The ladies look especially lovely in their brightly colored dresses. It is delightful to go floating on the dark evening lake in a gondola then. The lake is part of our city, like the church, or like a prince's *château de plaisance* is part of a monarchy's capital. Without the lake, our city would not be our city — no, you wouldn't recognize it at all. Our church, the Reformed Church, stands on a raised platform adorned with two wonderfully beautiful big chestnut trees. The windows of the church are painted in the most fiery colors, which makes it look like it's from a fairy tale. You can often hear the most lovely choir of singing voices from the church. I like to stand outside when they're singing inside. The women's singing is the prettiest. Our city hall is dignified, and its great hall is well suited to balls and other special occasions like that. We even have a theater. Every winter, actors from somewhere else visit us for two months. They have very sophisticated manners, speak a very fine German, and wear top hats on their heads. I am always glad when they come, and I do not go along with our fellow citizens when they talk contemptuously about the "riff-raff." It may be true that they don't pay their bills, that they're rude, that they get drunk, that they come from bad families, etc., but that's why they're artists, isn't it? An artist is someone you take a generous view of, through your fingers so to speak. They also are great actors. I saw them do *The Robbers.* It's a great play, full of fire and beautiful things. Is there any finer, nobler pastime than going to the theater? In this respect, big cities do provide the best example and surpass us. — Our city has much industry, which is because it has factories. Factories and the areas around them do not look nice. The air is black and thick there, and I don't understand how anyone can be around such unclean things. I don't care about what they make in the factories. I only know that all the poor people work in the factories, maybe to punish them for being so poor. We have pretty streets, and green trees peek out

between the houses everywhere. When it rains, the streets are very dirty. They don't do much for our streets. Father says that. It's too bad that our house doesn't have a lawn. We live on the second floor. Our apartment is nice but it should have a lawn. Mama complains about that a lot. The old quarter of the city is my favorite. I like to wander around the little old alleys, arches, and passageways. We have underground passageways too. All things considered, we have a very nice city.

CHRISTMAS

Christmas? Oh! This will be the hardest essay yet! It's impossible not to come up short when you try to write about something so wonderful. — In the streets, in the doorways, on the stairs, in the rooms, it smelled of oranges. The snow lay deep outside. Christmas without snow would be unbearable. That afternoon, two pitifully thin little voices made themselves heard through our front door. I went to open it. I knew it would be poor children. I looked at them for a rather long time, rather heartlessly. "What do you want?" I asked them. Then the little girl started crying. I felt bad that I had been so rude. Mother came to the door, sent me away, and gave the children little presents. When it was evening, Mother had me come into the lovely room. I did it trembling. I must admit that I have a kind of inexplicable fear of being given presents. My soul does not yearn for presents. I went in and my eyes hurt, as if I had entered a sea of light and lights. I peered into the darkness for a long time at first. Father was sitting there, in the leather armchair, smoking. He stood up and led me kindly over to the presents. He started laughing and chatting with me about the presents, what they meant, what they were worth, and about my future. I didn't let anyone see how happy that made me. Mother came and sat down with us. I felt like I had to say something loving to her but I couldn't get it past my lips. She noticed what I was trying to get out and hugged me close and kissed me. I was unspeakably happy and glad that she had understood me. I cuddled close to her and looked into her eyes. They were full of water. I said something but no sound came out. I was so happy that I could talk to my mother in this nicer way. After that we had a lot of fun. There was wine, in delicately cut glasses. That made the conversation flow with laughter. I told them about school and about the teachers, especially emphasizing their comic side. They were very willing to forgive my exuberant lack of restraint. Mother went over to the piano and played a simple song. Her playing is extraordinarily lovely. I recited a poem. My reciting is extraordinarily bad. The maid came in with cookies and other delicious baked goods (Mother's recipes). She made a stupid face

when they gave her her presents. But she gave my mother a polite kiss on the hand. My brother had not been able to come, which I was very sorry about. Our servant, old Fehlmann, got a big sealed package; he ran out to open it. We laughed. Christmas went by so quietly. Finally we were sitting all alone with our wine and we hardly said anything. Then the time passed quickly. It was twelve o'clock when we got up to go to bed. The next morning we all looked a bit tired. The Christmas tree too. This is all very badly written, isn't it? But at least I said in advance that it would be, so the criticism can't take me by surprise.

INSTEAD OF AN ESSAY

A letter to me from my brother: Dear Brother! I got your letter, read it, and read it again with amazement, yes, almost with admiration. You are a little scoundrel when it comes to style. You write like two professors put together. A real professional writer couldn't say it any better. Where did you get it from? — I especially liked what you wrote about art. Yes, brother, art is a great and beautiful thing, but it is damn hard. If it was made out of the fantastic ideas people had, it would be quickly and easily finished, but there's dexterity and craft that stands blocking the way between it and its execution. I have sighed more terrible sighs over it than a religious extremist. Brother, let me tell you: I have recently been writing poems. I sit at night for hours by the light of the lamp on my desk and I try to give my feelings a sonorous expression. It is hard, but other people, who seem to have no problems doing it, accomplish astounding things. There is one in particular who has even gotten famous. He is no older than I am and has already landed a book of poems. I'm not jealous but it pains me to see how far behind I still am despite all of my desperate efforts. Either the Muse smiles upon me in a hurry or I'm going to give it all up and become a mercenary. Studying philosophy seems ridiculous to me, and I'm not cut out for a job. I will carry off more laurels in some foreign army than I could harvest here, even if I got used to having a regular job. I will just live a wild, adventurous life, like so many other people who felt that life in their homeland was too narrow. I must admit that I'm worried about telling you these things. But I have faith in your strength and discretion. Our parents won't hear any of this from your lips, I'm sure of that. So, my dear brother, how are things with you? Before I go we have to spend one more lovely night with each other. Maybe I'll have some luck with my poems and then I won't need to run away. You wrote to me that you're bored. It's too early for that, my good man. It seems to me that your lively spirit and your mania for expressing yourself in fine, elegant phrases prove it. What I wanted to say was

that you were and are and always will be dear to me. You're a funny kid, and easy to talk to. You will be something very great in life or else I'm an idiot. Yes, art really makes me sweat. It would really be too bad if I had to give it all up. But either I'll create something first-rate or else nothing at all. Nothing is more pathetic than being a dilettante. Do you still take walks the way we used to together last summer? You can get a lot out of a solitary walk. Be patient with school. You may be twice as smart as your teacher but it's still good to stick it out. Goodbye kid, goodbye my dear fellow. In any case, we'll talk soon on a starry night over a beer about all the things that can be so beautiful and so ugly in this world. We need the wings of an eagle, but farewell! — I am using this letter from my brother in place of an essay because I'm totally lazybrained today. I ask that the teacher, insofar as one can request a favor of him as a man of honor, not tattle on my brother but observe the strictest secrecy. By the way, my dear brother's poems have long since won applause and made him famous.

THE FAIR

The usefulness of a fair is great, and the pleasure it gives perhaps even greater. The farmers bring their cattle to market, the merchants their goods, the performers their curiosities, and the artists their works. Everyone wants to buy and sell. One person sells what he's bought for a higher price and buys something else with the profit; someone else buys back the sold item from the buyer at a loss so that he can sell it somewhere else for more. Then maybe he slaps himself on the forehead and calls himself a fool. All anyone does is trade, bustle, shout, run around, look, and buy and sell. We impartial bystanders drift around in the crowded fair with our schoolboy intentions. There are plenty of grand things to see. The lady there with her tight-fitting red dress, feathered hat, and high little boots is a snake-charmer. I can watch her for hours with the greatest pleasure. She stands supremely still. Her face is pale, her eyes are big and lackluster, and the expression of her mouth is filled with contempt. I don't mind letting her despise me: She is so sad. She must bear some kind of indelible sorrow. — Here are the shooting galleries. This is where young patriots practice their bull's-eyes. The distance from the barrel of the gun to the target is admittedly not very great, but a lot of people still miss. Shots cost 5 cents each. An incredibly beautiful girl lures everyone in the mood to try shooting to her booth, and even people who aren't in the mood. Her colleagues give her the evil eye. She is as beautiful as a princess and friendly like no one else but her —. There are carousels everywhere, steam-powered and not. The music is not very uplifting and still you wouldn't want to do without

it. I let myself be carried up and down, and down and up. You ride in the most beautiful sleighs of silver and gold, the stars in the sky dance around you, the world revolves with you. It's worth the money. — Then there's the Kasperli puppet show. I'm glad I didn't walk past that and not see it. I would have missed out on the best laughs. You have to laugh at every blow that the Kasperl strikes with his monstrous whip. More people die than want to die. Death leaps out unbelievably fast and strikes his victims down with marvelous accuracy. These victims include generals, doctors, governesses, soldiers, policemen, and ministers. Not one of them dies a peaceful death, as the newspapers say. They are pretty violently executed. Kasperl gets away with a light beating. At the end of the show, he politely bows to us and invites us to a brand-new, never-before-performed show. I like how his rascally face never changes. — Here you can have your photograph taken. There a panorama offers anyone who wants to look the chance to see every continent and every historical event in the world. Here you can see the three-legged horse. And just three steps farther on, you can look at the biggest ox in the world. No one has to but everyone is most politely invited to. People pay their entrance fees as they walk by. We keep walking. I take one last look at the snake lady. Truly, she deserves it. She stands there as tall and motionless as a picture. My parents gave me a frank to spend. I wonder where it went. — Beautiful snake lady!

"The Fair"

MUSIC

I think music is the sweetest thing in the world. I absolutely adore

sounds. I would leap a thousand steps to hear a single sound. In summer, when I'm walking down the hot streets and I hear the sounds of a piano from a stranger's house, I often stand there and think I should die on the spot. I would like dying while listening to a piece of music. I imagine it as so easy, so natural, but of course it's impossible. Sounds stab too sweetly. The wounds hurt but they don't fester. Melancholy and suffering trickle out instead of blood. When the notes stop, everything is back to normal inside me. I go back to my homework, eating, or playing, and forget it. I think pianos make the most magical sounds. Even if someone with all thumbs is playing. I don't hear the playing, only the sounds. I will never be a musician, because making music would never be sweet and intoxicating enough for me. It is much holier to listen to music. Music always makes me feel sad, but sad like a sad smile. What I'm trying to say is: friendly-sad. When I hear happy music I can't think of it as happy, and the gloomiest music is for me in no way especially gloomy and depressing. I always have exactly the same feeling about music: something is missing. I will never learn the reason for this gentle sadness, and never want to try to figure it out. I don't want to know the answer. I don't want to know everything. In general, however intelligent I may seem to be, I possess very little thirst for knowledge. I think it's because my nature is the opposite of curious. I am happy to let lots of things happen around me without worrying about how or why. That is no doubt something to criticize me for, and not very well suited to helping me find my path in life. That may be true. I am not afraid of death and so I am also not afraid of life. It looks like I've ended up philosophizing. Music is the least intellectual and therefore the loveliest art. Purely rational beings will never appreciate it, but they are precisely the ones it is most deeply beneficial for, in the moments when they do listen to it. You can't try to comprehend and appreciate any kind of art. Art wants to cuddle up to us. Its nature is so completely pure and self-sufficient that it doesn't like it when you pursue it. It punishes whoever approaches it trying to grasp it. Artists know that. They are the ones who make art their profession, even though art absolutely does not like to be grasped. That is why I never want to be a musician. I am afraid of being punished by such a sweet creature. You can love an art but you have to make sure you don't admit it to yourself. The deepest love is when you don't even know you are in love. — Music hurts me. I don't know if I really do love it. It hits me wherever it finds me. I don't look for it. I let it caress me, but its caresses hurt. How can I put it? Music is a kind of crying in melodies, a remembering in notes, a painting in sounds. I can't say it right. And you can't really take seriously what I said before about art. These things aren't exactly on target, the same way no sounds have hit

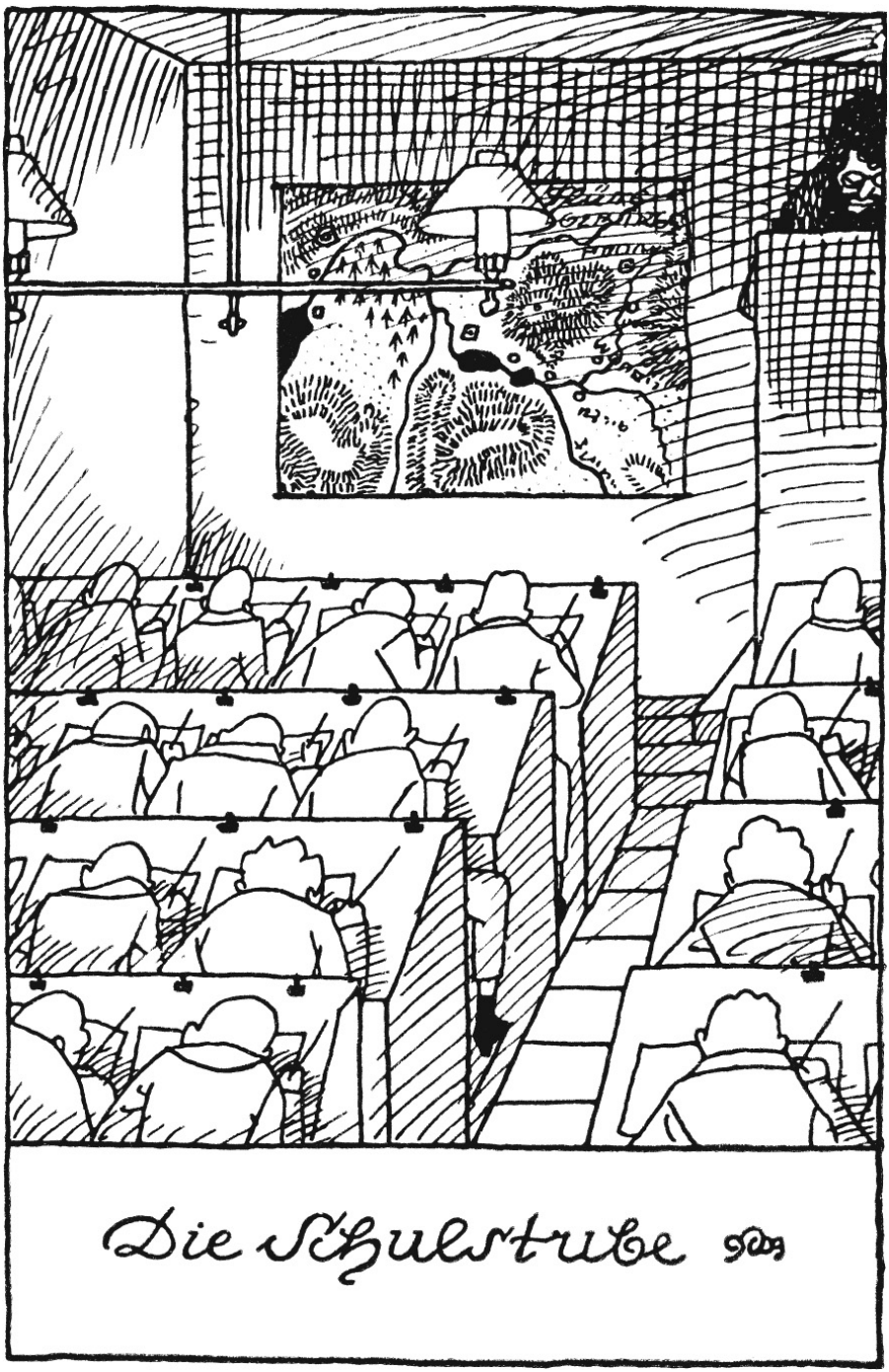
the target in me today. Something feels like it's missing when I haven't heard any music, and when I hear music, then I really feel like something is missing. That's the best I can do in trying to describe music.

THE ESSAY

Essays should always be written neatly and legibly. Only a bad essay-writer forgets to apply himself to the clarity of both the thoughts and the letters. You should always think first before you write. To start a sentence with an unfinished thought is sloppiness that can never be forgiven. And yet the slothful schoolboy believes that words will arise from other words. That is nothing but a vain and dangerous idea though. You get tired from walking on a country road much faster if you don't have a goal in mind. — Periods, commas, and other punctuation are a mistake to neglect, a mistake with a further consequence: untidiness of style. Style is a sense of order. Anyone with an unclear, untidy, unsightly mind will write in a style with those same qualities. From the style, says a proverb old and clichéd but no less true for all that, you can know the man. — When writing an essay, your elbows can't fly around too wildly back and forth. That annoys the writer next to you, who is no doubt not insensitive to disturbances since he too is a thinker and a writer. Writing is about getting quietly worked up. Anyone who can't sit still but who always has to act loud and self-important to get his work done will never be able to write anything lively and beautiful. — It's much prettier, and thus much quicker, and thus much more sensitive and pleasing to write on clean, smooth paper, so always make sure you have good writing paper ready. Why else are there so many stationery stores? Writing something thoughtful is good, but wanting to stuff your work too full of thoughts is something you should avoid. An essay, like any other work for that matter, should be pleasant to read and to use. Too many thoughts and opinions make the simple framework, in other words the form on which every essay must be draped, just collapse. What, then, is an essay? A quarry, a landslide, a raging fire that may be splendid to look at but is also very sad. Someone with no thoughts doesn't need his nose rubbed in this point, since there is no way he will overload his construction anyway. — Humor can be used in essays, but only as a subtle, delicate adornment. Anyone funny by nature needs to pay especially careful attention. Jokes that sound nice when they come out of your mouth only rarely look as good on paper. In addition, it is unrefined to make use of a gift one is richly endowed with in any but the most selective way. — Crossing out words looks messy. You should try to avoid this habit. I myself often need to

remind myself of this. Self, hear and obey! Looking in the notebook of the boy next to you, to steal thoughts or ideas that you can't think up yourself, is a rotten thing to do. No student should have so little self-respect that he prefers a stupid theft to the noble confession that his knowledge has reached its limits. It's best not to pester the teacher with questions and sighs. Acting like that is weak and it only shows how embarrassed you are about the knowledge you are supposed to have but don't. Teachers despise that.

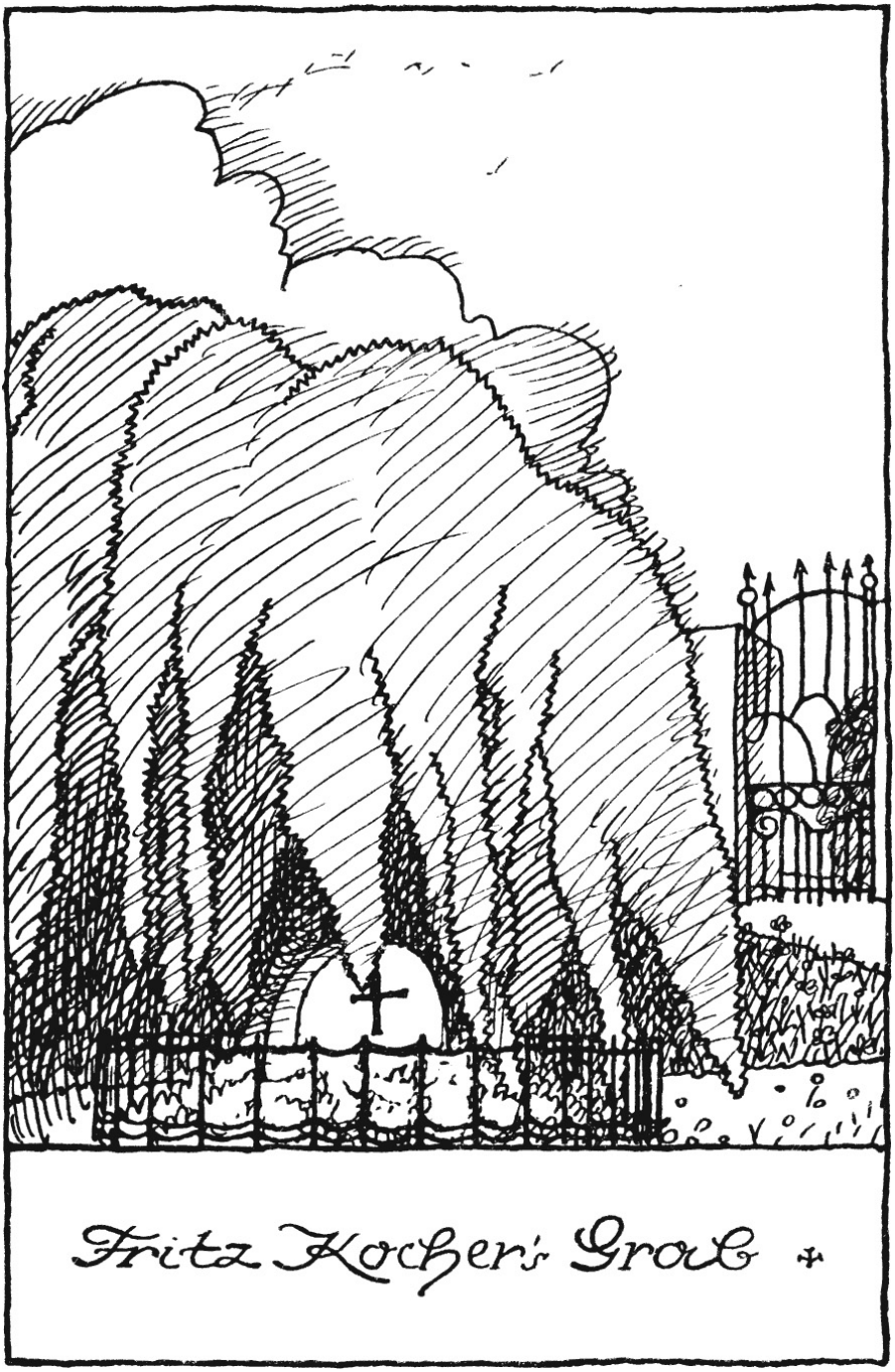
THE CLASSROOM



"The Classroom"

Our classroom is a miniature world. After all, can't all the feelings and passions in the world be found just as well among thirty people as among thirty thousand? Love and hate, ambition and revenge, nobler and also more primitive conceptions all play an important role with

us. We have poverty and richness, knowledge and stupidity, success and failure in all their variations and fine distinctions. You often have the opportunity in the classroom to play the hero, the traitor, the victim, the martyr. If a novelist or poet cast his eye into our social world he would find rich material for exciting works. We are short-tempered and affectionate, hotheaded and docile, obedient and fresh, sarcastic and pious, moved and silly, indifferent and enthusiastic. We have every type of virtue and bad behavior among us, every kind of rascalliness and charm. You have to respect us, whether you want to or not. Often the teacher in fact hates one or another of us in the most violent way. Maybe he shouldn't do that. We are maybe not worth being taken so seriously. He really does stand a bit too high, too far superior to us. It seems to me at least that it would make more sense for him to mock us than hate us. We have a class clown in our class. He gives us more to laugh at in fifteen minutes than ten other kids in a whole year. He is unbelievably good at making funny faces and has all kinds of expressions at his disposal. His sheep face is for when he's in real trouble. He puts that one on when he's getting caned. We all like him, and even the biggest scaredy-cat in our class would never dream of tattling on him to the teacher. On walks and field trips and in games, he's our god. His pranks are never-ending and make the air shake with our laughter. We are always pushing him into playing naughty tricks, which he does as casually as can be, no matter how bold they may seem to us. Even the teacher can't help laughing along with us sometimes, probably because he's touched by so much humor. He is also a handsome, flexible boy, good at gymnastics, smart, but he pays so little attention it's outrageous. Every day blows rain down upon his back. He will come to a bad end if he's ever caught playing one of his crazy, reckless tricks. And it has to happen sometime. His parents won't feel any particularly great sorrow when it does, because they are small-minded people and don't look after their son much. In a certain sense he is noble. All unthinking, slovenly people are. When they do something bad it is only a game. It's their passion, and being totally in the grip of a passion is never smart, but it is beautiful. He is like a kind of king among us. We are all happy to follow him, because every one of us secretly feels sorry for how abandoned he is. That is our little world. The teacher is like someone from the bigger outside world. But really he is too small to seem big to us.



"Fritz Kocher's Grave"
1904

PART II

GREIFEN LAKE

IT IS A crisp, clear morning and I set out to hike from the big city and its big famous lake to a small, almost unknown lake. Along the way, I encounter nothing but everything an ordinary person can encounter on his ordinary way. I say “Good day” to a couple of hard-working reapers, that’s all; I attentively observe the dear flowers, that’s all too; I start a friendly chat with myself, that is once again all. I do not pay attention to any special features of the landscape, because I’m walking and I think that there is nothing special for me here anymore. And so I walk, and in so walking I have already passed the first village, with the big wide houses, with the parks inviting the walker to rest and forget, with the splashing fountains, the beautiful trees, courtyards, shops, and other things I don’t at the forgetful moment happen to remember. I keep walking and only start paying attention again when the lake shimmers forth over the green foliage and quiet tips of the fir trees; I think: That is my lake, which I have to walk to, which draws me to it. The way in which and reason why it draws me to it are things the gentle reader will soon know himself should he have any interest in continuing to follow my description, which will now take the liberty of bypassing paths, meadows, forest, forest stream, and field and leap all the way to the little lake itself, where it will stop along with me and be unable to marvel enough at the unexpected, only secretly suspected beauty of said lake. Let us now let it speak for itself in all its traditional volubility: It is a broad, white silence, edged with green, airy silence; it is lake and surrounding forest; it is sky, and so light-blue, so half-sad a sky; it is water, and so sky-like is the water that it could just as well be the sky and the sky the blue water; it is sweet blue warm silence and morning; it is a beautiful, beautiful morning. I cannot find the words for it, although I have put forth far too many words already, it seems to me. I do not know what to describe because all of it is so beautiful, so simply there for sheer beauty’s sake. The sun shines down from the sky onto the lake which becomes completely like a sun with the sleepy shadows of the life all around it quietly rocking back and forth within it. There is nothing to disturb the scene, everything is lovely in the sharpest closeness, in the haziest distance; all the colors in the world play together and are a single charmed and charming world of morning. The high Appenzeller mountains rise up modestly in the distance, no cold wrong note, no, only a high, distant, blurry green,

part of the green that is so splendid, so soft, in the whole vicinity. Oh, how soft, how still, how pristine this vicinity is, and consequently how still, soft, and pristine is this little, practically unnamed lake. — This description of mine, an enthusiastic, enraptured description, really does talk like that. And what should I add? If I had to start over again I would talk the same way it does, for this description is utterly what my heart has to say. On the whole lake I see only a single duck, swimming back and forth. I quickly pull off my clothes and do as the duck does: I swim far out into the lake, with the greatest delight, until my breast has to work hard, my arms are tired, and my legs are sore. What a pleasure it is to tire oneself out with pure delight! The sky that has already been described, described with far too little heartfeltness, is above me and a sweet, silent depth is beneath me; and with anxious, apprehensive breast, I work my way across the depth back to land, where I shiver and laugh and cannot breathe, almost cannot breathe. The old Greifensee Castle says hello from across the lake, but I have absolutely no interest in historical recollections at the moment; rather, I look forward to spending an evening or night here at this very place, and I go over and over in my mind what it will be like on this little lake when the last light of day hovers over its surface, or how it will be when the countless stars hover overhead — and I swim out again.—

July 1899; 1914

SIX LITTLE STORIES

1. ABOUT A POET

A POET is bent over his poems, of which he has assembled twenty. He turns one page after another and finds that every poem awakens a very particular feeling inside him. He racks and racks his brain to try to figure out what kind of something it is hovering over or around his poeticizings. He presses hard but nothing comes out, he strikes with the ball of his hand but nothing comes out, he pulls but everything stays exactly as it is, namely shrouded in darkness. He lays his head down on his crossed arms and completely covers the open book with his body and cries. I, on the other hand, the wag of a writer, am bent over his work and can solve with infinite ease the riddle of his volume. Very simply, it contains twenty poems, one of which is simple, one pompous, one enchanting, one boring, one moving, one divine, one childish, one very bad, one animalistic, one awkward, one impermissible, one incomprehensible, one repulsive, one charming, one reticent, one magnificent, one tasteful, one

worthless, one poor, one unspeakable, and one more cannot be because there are only twenty different poems, each of which has received from my lips perhaps not exactly a just but at least a quick judgment, which always takes the least trouble on my part. One thing is certain, though: The poet who wrote them is still crying, bent over the book; the sun is shining over him; and my laughter is the wind that violently, coldly musses his hair.

2. LUTE

I play upon the lute of memory. It is a minor instrument, which always only makes one and the same sound. This sound is sometimes long, sometimes short, sometimes sluggish, sometimes quick. It breathes calm breaths, or else it surpasses itself in a hasty leap. It is sad and merry. The strange thing is that when it sounds melancholy it makes me laugh, that when it is merry and leaping I cannot keep from crying. Has there ever been a sound like it? Has music ever been played on such a wondrous instrument? It is almost impossible to pick it up, this instrument: Hands, even the softest and most slender of build, are too rough for it. It has unspeakably thin, delicate strings. Hairs are halters in comparison. There is a young man who knows how to play it, and I, who have time to settle down and wait, listen to him. He plays day and night, without thought of food or drink, late into the night and the day. From day to night and from night to day again. Time must exist for him only so that he can let it waft past him like a melody. The same way I listen to him, the lute player, he, the lute player, spends the whole time listening to his beloved, i.e., the sound of his instrument. Never has a lover listened and lain in wait so faithfully, so steadfastly. How sweet it is to listen to a listener, to watch a lover, to feel a forgotten one at one's side. The young man is an artist, memory his instrument, night his space, dream his time, and the melodies he gives to life are his faithful servants who speak of him into the greedy ears of the world. I am only an ear, an unutterably moved ear.

3. PIANO

There is a boy, I don't know his name, who is lucky enough to enjoy lessons on the grand piano from a very beautiful and regal piano teacher. Right at this moment he is being instructed in agility on the

keys by the most beautiful hands on earth. The lady's hands glide across the keys like white swans on dark water. They already say very gracefully what later lips will repeat. The boy is wreathed in absent-mindedness, which the teacher does not seem to want to notice. "Play that"—but he plays it indescribably badly. "Play it again"—but he plays it even worse than before. Well, he needs to play it yet again — but he plays badly. "You're lazy." He cries, he to whom this is said. She smiles, she who says it. He lays his head down on the piano, he who has to accept this being said of him. She strokes his soft brown hair, she who has had no choice but to say it. Now the boy, awakened from his shame by the soft caress, kisses the loving hand, which is very elegant and white. Now the lady throws her splendid arms, which are very soft and just the right tongs for a hug, around the boy's neck. Now the lady lets herself kiss him and now the lips of the dear boy succumb to a kiss from the friendly lady. Now the knees of the kissee have nothing more urgent to do than sink down like falling blades of grass, and the arms of the kneeler nothing simpler to do than clasp the respective knees of the lady. The lady's knees likewise waver, and now both of them, beautiful gracious lady and ordinary poor young man, are a single embrace, a kiss, a tumbling to the floor, a teardrop — and something else, too: an unexpected nasty surprise for someone who at this very moment opens the doors of the room, thereby bringing the sweetness of the love both have now forgotten, and also the story thereof, to an end.

4.

Now I've just remembered that once upon a time there lived a poor poet, very oppressed by dark moods, who, since he had seen his fill of God's great world, decided to put only his imagination into his poems. He sat one evening, afternoon, or morning, at eight, twelve, or two o'clock, in the dark space of his room and he said to the wall the following: Wall, I've got you in my head. Don't try to trick me with your strange and placid visage! From now on, you are the prisoner of my imagination. Thereupon he said the same thing to the window and to the gloomy view it offered him day after day. After which, spurred on by wanderlust, he undertook a walk that led him through fields, forests, meadows, villages, cities, and over rivers and lakes, always under the same beautiful sky. But to these fields, forests, meadows, villages, cities, and rivers he continually repeated: Guys, I've got you locked tight in my head. Don't any of you think any longer that you make an impression on me. He went home, constantly laughing to

himself: I have them all, I have them all in my head. And presumably he has them in there still, and they can't (however much I want to help them do so) get out again. Isn't this story very full of imagination???

5.

Once there was a poet who loved it in his room so much that he spent the whole day sitting in his easy chair pondering the walls before his eyes. He took the pictures off said walls so as not to have any diverting object disturb him and lead him astray into observing anything other than the small, nasty, grimy wall. Although we cannot in fairness say that he was intentionally studying the room, rather we have to admit: He lay shackled, without a thought in his head, in a pointless daydream, in which his mood was neither happy nor sad, neither cheerful nor melancholy, but rather as cold and indifferent as that of an insane person. He spent three months in this state and on the day that the fourth month was about to begin he could no longer stand up. He was stuck fast. That is an unusual occurrence, and there is a certain implausibility in the storyteller's pledge that even more unusual occurrences are to follow. But just then a friend of the poet's went looking for the poet in his room and, as soon as he entered it, fell into the same sad or ridiculous daydreaming as the one the first poet lay caught in. Some time later, the same misfortune befell a third writer of verse or novels who came to look in on his friend; it befell six writers in total, one after the other, all of whom came to see what their friend was up to. Now all seven are sitting in this small, dark, gloomy, unfriendly, cold, bare room and it is snowing outside. They are stuck to their seats and will probably never again undertake another plein-air description. They sit and stare, and the friendly laughter that greets this story is unable to free them from their tragic fate. Good night!

6. THE BEAUTIFUL PLACE

This story, although I have my doubts about its veracity, gave me, when someone told it to me, great pleasure, and I will tell it here as well as I can, but under one condition: that no one interrupt me with yawning before it is over. Once upon a time there were two lyric poets, one of whom, a very high-strung, sensitive young man, called

himself Emanuel. The other, a rougher type, was named Hans. Emanuel had discovered a corner of the forest concealed from all the world, where he was in the habit of very happily writing poetry. To this end, he wrote down well-meaning and insignificant verses in a notebook he had inherited from his grandfather, and he seemed supremely satisfied with this profession of his. And really, why wouldn't he be? The place in the forest was so quiet and pleasant, the sky overhead so cheerful and blue, the clouds so entertaining, the line of trees across from him so various and of such sought-after colors, the grass so soft, the brook irrigating this remote forest glade so refreshing, that our Emanuel would have had to be crazy to feel anything other than happy. The sky smiled down on his innocent versifying as bluely and beautifully as it did on the forest trees; this idyll's peace seemed so indestructible that the disturbance now about to enter the scene like the accident of the week will necessarily seem very implausible. But here is what happened: I have already mentioned Hans. Hans, the second lyric poet, was wandering in the woods one day, near this solitary place, letting chance take him where it would, and he happened to discover the corner and its occupant, brother Emanuel. At once, although they had never laid eyes on each other before, Hans recognized the poet in Emanuel, the way one bird immediately recognizes another. He crept up behind him and, to make a long story short, gave him a good hard slap in the face, so that Emanuel let out a loud scream and, without stopping to see who had thus maltreated him, leapt to his feet and vanished, so quickly in fact that he was out of sight at that very instant. Hans rejoiced in his triumph! He had every reason to hope that he had driven his rival from the beautiful and productive locale forever, and already he was pondering how best and most effectively he could portray the loveliness of this lonely forest clearing. He too had a notebook with him, full of verses both bad and good that he hoped to publish shortly. He pulled out this book now and began to scribble down all sorts of brainlessnesses, the way lyric poets are wont to do to put themselves into the proper mood. He seemed, however, to have serious difficulty forcing the calm, gentle beauty of his conquered landscape into tender syllables in such a way that even a shimmer of life peeked out of them; and just as he was tormenting himself in this way, a new torment arose before or behind him, of such a sort that it necessarily spoiled for him too this paradise he had, like a yapping dog, driven the other poet out of. A third person appeared on the scene in the form of a poet: a *female* poet. Hans, who, startled by the noise, had looked up, recognized her immediately as such, lost no time with gallantries, and instead vanished in an instant like his predecessor. — Here the nice little story breaks off and I fully approve and understand

its powerlessness to continue since I would be just as little able to continue here, where any continuation would necessarily lead straight into an abyss of pointlessness. For would it not be on the pointless side to run on about the poetess's behavior here where the fates of the other two poets have already been sung? I will content myself with reporting that she found nothing beautiful in the forest spot's beauty and nothing rare in its rarity and that she disappeared as noisily as she had showed up. Let the Devil write poetry.

August 1901; 1914

LETTER FROM A POET TO A GENTLEMAN

TO YOUR letter, honored Sir, which I found on my table this evening and in which you request that I suggest a place and time where and when we might meet, I feel constrained to reply that I don't really know what to say to you. Certain misgivings arise in me since I am, you should know, someone not worth being met. I am extremely rude, with practically no manners whatsoever. To give you an opportunity to see me would mean introducing you to a person who cuts off half the rim of his felt hat with scissors to give it a wilder, more bohemian appearance. Is that the kind of strange being you really want to have before you? I was very glad to get your amiable letter. But you must have addressed it wrong. I am not the man who deserves to receive such courtesies. I ask you: Please abandon at once your desire to make my acquaintance. Civility is not welcome, as far as I am concerned, because then I would have to show the corresponding civility to you and that is just what I would prefer to avoid, since I know that well-bred behavior is not my style. Also, I don't much like to be civil; it bores me. I presume that you have a wife, that your wife is elegant, and that you host something along the lines of a salon. Anyone who makes use of expressions as fine and lovely as yours has a salon. But I am merely a man on the street, in the forests and fields, in the pub and in my own room; I would stand around like a yokel in someone's salon. I have never been to a salon in my life, I'm afraid of them, and as a man of sound mind I obviously avoid what frightens me. You are most likely a rich man who lets fall rich words. I, on the other hand, am poor, and everything I say sounds like poverty. Either you would put me in a bad mood with what you uttered or I you with what I. You can have no idea of how honestly and sincerely I prefer and love the condition in which I live. As poor as I am, it has never once to this day occurred to me to complain — on the contrary, I value my surroundings so highly that I am constantly eagerly active in preserving them. I live in a dreary old house, a kind of ruin actually. But it makes me happy. The sight of

poor people and derelict houses makes me happy, while of course I am also fully aware of how little reason you would have to understand this predilection. I need a certain quantity and amount of dilapidation, deterioration, and squalor around me, otherwise it is painful to breathe. Life would be torture to me if I were fine, elegant, and splendid. Elegance is my enemy, and I would rather try to go three days without eating than entangle myself in daring to undertake performing a bow. Honored Sir, this is said not with pride but rather with a decided sense of harmony and comfort. Why should I be what I am not, and not be what I am? That would be stupid. When I am what I am, I am content, and then everything resonates and is good all around me too. You see, it's like this: Even a new suit makes me utterly discontent and unhappy, from which I conclude that anything beautiful, fine, and new is something I hate, and anything old, used, and shabby is something I love. It's not like I love bugs; I certainly wouldn't want to eat bugs; but bugs don't bother me. In the house where I live, it is positively crawling with bugs, and still I am happy to live there. It looks like a hovel, something to clasp to one's heart. If everything in the world were new and neat and clean I would not want to live, I would kill myself. So I am afraid in a way of something when I contemplate being introduced to a distinguished, educated gentleman like yourself. I may well fear that I will only annoy you and bring you no advantage or uplift, but so too do I feel the other, equally vivid fear, namely that, to be perfectly open and frank about it, you too will annoy me and be incapable of being uplifting or agreeable to me. There is a soul in every single human condition, and you must definitely hear, and I must definitely tell you, that I value greatly what I am, however meager and lowly it may be. I consider all envy stupid. Envy is a kind of insanity. Everyone should respect the situation in which he finds himself: It's better for everybody that way. I also fear the influence you might have over me, that is: I am afraid of the unnecessary inner work that would be required of me to ward off your influence. For that reason, I do not go running around after new friends and acquaintances — cannot, in fact, so run. To meet someone new is, at the very least, always work, and I have already permitted myself the liberty to tell you that I love comfort. What will you think of me? Whatever it is, I can't let that bother me. I insist on remaining unbothered by that. Nor do I intend to beg your forgiveness for speaking to you in this way. That would be an empty phrase. Anyone who speaks the truth is always rude. I love the stars, and the moon is my secret friend. The sky is over my head. For as long as I live, I will never unlearn looking up at it. I stand upon the earth: that is my standpoint. The hours joke around with me, and I joke around with them, and I could wish for no more delightful entertainment. Day

and night are my company. I am on familiar terms with twilight and daybreak. And with that, friendly greetings from

— A POOR YOUNG POET

1914

THE POET

DREAM of morning and dream of evening; light and night; moon and sun and stars. The rosy light of day and the pale light of night. The hours and the minutes; the weeks and the whole wonderful year. Many times I looked up at the moon as though at the secret friend of my soul. The stars were my dear comrades. When the sun shined its gold down into the pale cold misty world, how happy it made me down here. Nature was my garden, my passion, my dearest beloved. Everything I saw was mine: the woods and the fields, the trees and the paths. When I looked into the sky I was like a prince. But the most beautiful of all was evening. Evenings were fairy tales for me, and night with its heavenly darkness was for me like a magic castle full of sweet, impenetrable secrets. Often the soulful sounds of a lyre played by some poor man or another pierced the night. Then I could listen, listen. Then all was good, right, and lovely, and the world was full of inexpressible grandeur and merriment. But I was merry even without music. I felt ensnared by the hours. I talked with them as though with loving creatures, and imagined that they talked back to me too; I looked at them as though they had faces, and had the feeling that they were silently observing me too, as though with a strange kind of friendly eye. I oftentimes felt as though drowned in the sea, so silently, noiselessly, soundlessly did my life unfold. I cultivated familiar dealings with everything no one notices. About whatever no one bothers to think about I thought for days on end. But it was a sweet thinking, only rarely did sadness visit me. Now and then it leapt up to me in my secluded room like a rollicking invisible dancer and made me laugh. I did no harm to anyone, and no one did any harm to me either. I was so nicely, wonderfully apart.

1914

THE MOUNTAIN

WITHOUT subjecting yourself to a certain amount of physical exertion you will not, of course, reach the top of the beautiful mountain. And yet, I feel, you will not shy away from the task of climbing. It is a bright, warm — even hot — cheerful early morning — perhaps late morning — in summer and the world, as far as your eye can see, consists of a lake and a river, a haze of blue and green.

Oftentimes you stop and stand for a while to catch your breath, wipe the sweat from your brow, and look down into the valley. And now you will permit me to imagine that you have arrived happy and merry on the soft, green, broad mountain ridge, where the cool pure mountain air at once swirls around you, which you breathe in with delight, so that your lungs expand and your heart too. Standing on the heights you have ascended feels divinely beautiful to you, dear friend, and you feel about to drown in the enjoyment of this sweet, high, mountain freedom. Exactly as though drowned in the sea of delicious air and the sea of the joy of the mountain climber, that is how you seem to yourself. You feel blessed to be able to look down at the world lying at your feet like a bright and jolly painting down there and resounding and smelling like a song, like a poem, like a mirage. Slowly you walk on through the pasture, under fir branches and charming beech leaves which smile at you with their fresh, godlike color as though with a child's smile, and then you lie blissfully, without a thought in your head, on the ground for a half or perhaps a whole hour; you stand up again and continue walking through the whole sweet hot melody of blue and green spread all around. The green is so succulent and lush that you feel it as a flood in which you wade, bathe, wallow. It is a reveling, a walking wreathed in pleasure, a pleasurable stroll in Arcadia. Greece is no more noble and beautiful, Japan with its princely gardens could be no more inundated with pleasure and joy. Gently and softly the distant sounds of busy daily life rise up from the depths of the populated plains to your listening ear, while your eyes drink in the blindingly beautiful dear white of a cloud floating in the blue sky like a fairy-tale ship. Sweet cooing and roaring, sweet humming and whispering airs, and there you stand under all that light, in all that light, among all those colors, and you look across to the nearby mountains reaching up into the air silently, big and shrouded in mist, like figures in a dream, and you greet them like friends — you are their friend, they are your friends. You are the whole world's friend; you want to fall into its arms, the arms of this wonderful friend. She holds you in her arms and you hold her. You understand her, you love her, and she you.

1914

A CURIOUS CITY

ONCE THERE was a city. The people there were all puppets. But they walked and talked, they had movement and feeling and were very polite. They not only said: Good morning, or: Good night, they meant it too, and with all their hearts. These people had heart. At the same time they were consummate city people. They had shaken off,

indignantly as it were, everything rough and bespeaking the countryside. The cut of both their clothes and their behavior was the finest that any judge of human nature or professional tailor could imagine. Shabby, old clothes hanging loose on the body were worn by no one. Good taste had worked its way into every single individual, there was no so-called rabble, they were all completely equal in manners and education, without, nonetheless, being similar to each other, which would have been boring. Thus none but lovely, elegant people with free and noble deportments were to be seen on the street. They knew how to wield, steer, rein in, and preserve their freedom in the most subtle ways. As a result, it never came to outrages with regard to public decency. Just as little were there offenses against good manners. The women especially were magnificent. Their clothes were as charming as they were practical, as beautiful as they were enticing, as respectable as they were pretty. What was moral *was* enticing! The young men strolled along in the evening behind these enticing creatures, slowly, as though dreaming, without falling into hasty, greedy movements. The women wore a kind of pants, mostly white or light-blue lace culminating at the top in a narrow cinched waist. Their shoes were colorful, high, and of the finest leather. It was lovely how their shoes nestled up against their feet and then their legs, and how their legs could feel themselves surrounded by something precious, and how the men could feel how the women's legs felt that! The fact that the women wore pants was good in that they put their spirit and language into their stride, which, hidden under a dress, would feel less watched and judged. In general, everything was a single feeling. The businesses were booming since the people were lively, busy, and upstanding. Upstanding by education and also by innate delicacy. To make one another's easy, beautiful lives contentious — that they did not want. There was enough money around and enough for everyone, because they were all intelligent enough to take care of the necessities first, and also because everyone made it easy for everyone else to come into a nice amount of money. There were no Sundays, just as little was there religion of any sort, which could have given rise to conflicts about its rules and covenants. The churches were places of entertainment where the people gathered for services. Pleasure was a deep and sacred thing for these people. That you stayed pure in your pleasures was a given, for after all everyone has need of them. There were no poets. A poet would not have known how to say anything edifying or new to such people. In fact there were no professional artists at all, since facility at all kinds of art was universally widespread. It is good when people do not need artists to give them the gift of awakening them to art. They were already so gifted because they had learned to protect their senses

as something precious and use them as such as well. They did not need to look up phrases and sayings in books because they had fine, continual, alert, and quivering sensibilities of their own. They spoke beautifully, when they had reason to speak; they had a mastery of language, without knowing how it had happened that they had come to acquire it. There were many things that entertained and occupied them, but everything took place in relation to love for beautiful women. All was brought into delicate, dreamy relation with everything else. They spoke and thought about everything with feeling. They knew how to discuss business matters more sensitively, nobly, and simply than we do today. There were no so-called higher things. Even to imagine anything fitting that description would have been disagreeable to these people, who took everything that existed as beautiful. Everything that happened, happened gaily. Really? Is that true? What an idiot I am! No, everything I've said about this city and these people is total nonsense. It's all made up. It is all plucked from thin air. Get lost, kid!

Then the kid went for a walk and sat down on a park bench. It was midday. The sun was shining through the trees and making splotches on the path, on the faces of the strolling people, on the ladies' hats, on the grass, that rascally sun. The sparrows hopped nimbly around and nannies rolled their little prams. It was like a dream, a mere game, a picture. The kid rested his head on his elbows and was absorbed in the picture. Suddenly he stood up and left. Well, it's his business. Then the rain started falling and it washed away the picture.

January 1905; 1914

THE ISLAND

TWO NEWLYWEDS from Berlin went on a trip. The journey was long. Finally, the young bride and groom arrived in a city built entirely from serious red stones, and a wide blue river flowed over them through it. A tall, majestic cathedral was reflected in the water's surface. Still, to them the city did not seem made for longer stays, and they traveled onward, and since it was raining they opened a large umbrella and took shelter under it. They reached an old castle tucked away in a remote park and shyly went inside. A lovely stone spiral staircase, as if made for a ruling prince, led up to the second floor. Old, dark paintings hung on the high, snow-white walls. They knocked on a heavy old door. "Come in." And there, sunk deep in mysterious, erudite work, sat an ancient little man at his desk. The couple from Berlin asked if they could stay in the castle, they liked it. But they couldn't get anywhere with the old man, who only shook his head

ponderously. So they went on. They ended up in a blizzard but worked their way out of it, and so their journey continued, through forests, villages, and cities. Nowhere could they discover any fitting place to spend a little time enjoying themselves, and on top of that the waiters in the hotels were fresh, the rascals. They spent one night in a hotel where there were admittedly the softest and most beautiful horsehair mattresses, and exquisite curtains over the windows, but the shamefully exorbitant prices practically gave them heart attacks. They went all the way to Venice, to the sneering Italians. The scoundrels, they sang serenades but pried loose the foreigners' money with a crowbar for their trouble. Finally, fortune smiled upon them. They saw in the distance, in the middle of a charming lake, an adorable island shimmering light-green, and they steered toward it, and there they found it so beautiful that they couldn't bear to leave. They stayed to live on the island. The beauty of its landscape was like a lovely sweet girl's smile. They made their home there and were happy.

1914

[UNTITLED, CROSSED OUT]

IF I WERE to take a trip in Switzerland, I would very probably get off the train in Basel first, spend the night in a hotel, and set out on foot early the next morning for a hike over the Jura Mountains. I picture the time of year as fall and my mood as passable. To sit in country inns and wait for lunch to be served is a savory treat and I would have the best possible conversations with the lady innkeepers and, where present, their daughters until the food came. Afterwards I would take to my feet again. Evening valleys would be roamed through. During the nights, ideally nice and chilly, the stars would shimmer and I would think back to the big city while hiking through the darkness, and it would seem very large and beautiful to me, like everything you can't see clearly and understand. In the bright, hot midday sun I would stop for a moment to rest under a fir, beech, or oak tree, stretching out on the moss or grass. It is so nice to relax, but that presupposes a preceding strain or effort, just as there is nothing truly good in this world of ours except where something bad has had to have been overcome. But where am I? Am I actually on a hike right now? How is that possible?

ca. 1910(?)

THE HEATHSTONE

IN THE forest, which draws me to it again and again because it is so beautiful, there stands, under the tall, slim, serious fir trees, a stone

that people call the Heathstone, a dusky block of granite overgrown with moss that schoolboys like to clamber up, a wondrous testimony from ancient, wondrous times, and under its strange gaze you involuntarily come to a stop to reflect on life. Silent, hard, and tall it stands amid the lovely green homey forest, washed with countless rain showers, hidden in the realm of the silent faithful firs, an image of bygone days, expression of sheer eternal lastingness, and proof of the unthinkable age of the earth. I have often enough stood stock-still before the handsome stone, adorned with two marvelous old fir trees that have found room to grow majestically on the venerable rock. Today, too, I saw it again, and when I did, the following words, murmured quietly to myself, passed my lips: “Oh, how soft and weak and fragile human life is, after all, compared to your life, you old, indestructible stone. You have lived from the beginning of the world until today and you will live and stand there until the doubtful end of all life. Age seems to have solidified and strengthened you rather than damaging and weakening you. Everywhere around you, sensitive human beings die. Generations follow generations, which, like dreams, and similar to mere gentle breaths of wind, surface and vanish away again. You know no weakness. Impatience is foreign to you. Thoughts do not touch you and feelings do not approach you. And yet you live, you are living, you lead your stony existence. Tell me, are you alive?”—Full of strange questions, full of vague premonitions, I parted from my remarkable old stubborn stony hard companion, and I had the feeling that he was a magician, as though the woods were enchanted by him.

1914

TWO LITTLE THINGS

I

FIRST of all, everyone has to take care of himself, so that things can be easy and carefree everywhere. You have a tendency to always think about the other person and forget yourself. But does this other person thank you for that, and can he? No one likes to be thankful. Everyone wants whatever he is to be thanks to himself. “That’s entirely thanks to me” is something a person likes to say. Anyway, to the extent that you only just think about someone, you haven’t helped him do anything yet, even though you may well have already significantly neglected yourself. No one loves people who neglect themselves, you know.

II

I was walking just so and while making my way along just so I ran into a dog, and I paid careful attention to the good animal, by which I mean to say that I looked at it for rather a long time. What a fool I am, am I not? For is there not something foolish about stopping on the street due to a dog and losing valuable time? But in making my way along just so I absolutely did not have the sense that time was valuable, and so, after some time, I continued on my leisurely way. I thought, "How hot it is today!" and indeed it was really very warm.

1914

BY THE LAKE

ONE EVENING after dinner I hurried out to the lake, which was darkly shrouded in I no longer quite recall what type of rainy melancholy. I sat down on a bench under the loose branches of a willow tree and gave myself over to indefinite contemplation, wanting to convince myself that I was nowhere, a philosophy that put me into a curiously exciting state of contentment. How splendid it was, this picture of sadness on the rainy lake into whose warm gray water it was thoroughly and as it were carefully raining. I could see in my mind's eye my old father with his white hair, which made me the insignificant, bashful schoolboy, and the picture of my mother mingled with the quiet, graceful rippling of the gentle waves. In the large lake, looking at me as much as I at it, I saw childhood also looking at me as though with clear, good, beautiful eyes. Soon I entirely forgot where I was; soon I remembered again. A few silent people walked warily back and forth on the promenade; two factory girls sat down on the bench next to mine and started chatting with each other; and out on the water, out there in the dear lake, where the lovely cheerful crying gently spread, nautical aficionados still sailed in sailboats and rowed in rowboats, umbrellas open over their heads, a view that let me imagine I was in China or Japan or some other equally dreamy, poetic country. It rained so sweetly, so softly on the water, and it was so dark. All my thoughts slumbered, then all my thoughts were wide awake again. A steamship pulled out onto the lake; its golden lights shimmered marvelously on the bare, silver-dark water bearing the beautiful ship as though happy about its own fairy-tale appearance. Night fell soon afterward, and with it came the friendly command to stand up from the bench under the trees, leave the promenade, and begin the walk home.

January 1915

(published with next two pieces as

"Three Little Fabulations")

THE CITY

I REMEMBER how beautiful our city was on spring evenings. The homey, wide old streets glowed in the dim light. Lively as our city is, numerous people no less free than calm and well-bred were walking upon its streets. The pretty shop windows shimmered. One of the streets was completely full of people from every walk of life. I heard the bright, easy chitchat and twittering of young girls. Men strode along or stood silently in casual groups in the middle of the street. Some were smoking pipes. In one of the quiet side streets, a band gave a concert. A large cheerful audience stood around and listened. All the people anyone could see were so peaceful, so charming; all the windows were open to let the mild night air into the dark rooms. It was as though the pretty, cheerful city were especially made for spring, as though there could now not be any spring anywhere else but just there. I was enchanted by everything I saw and everything I heard. All at once I felt ten years younger. The tall trees here and there in the parks were wonderful: majestic old chestnut trees with round, rich, dark crowns, and in other places slim pointed firs, whose tips seemed to instigate a friendship or love affair with the stars and the moon. Everywhere it smelled and murmured and resounded of spring, love, and charming companionableness. The night and the city seemed to me the very expression of harmlessness and carefreeness. I felt very gentle, and at the same time also so quiet. Solitude and sweetness, sincerities and secrecies had joined together into a single bond and sound. The buildings stood there, some pitch black, some brightly lit up by the streetlights, like friendly figures you could converse and associate with. The lights in the whole dear deep dark warm night warbled and whispered and offered up their sweet, tender secrets, and in the thick darkness under low-hanging tree branches I felt wrapped in another way in infinite well-being. Time seemed to stand still because it had to stop and eavesdrop on all the beauty and all the evening magic. Everything dreamed because it was alive, and everything lived because it was permitted to dream. Beautiful noble ladies strolled slowly by on their husband's or lover's arm. The whole city was out on a promenade, and huge, wonderful clouds floated in the sky like the beautiful bodies of gods, as though kind hands were resting on a forehead, as though good divinities wanted to protect the city from all evil. The streets looked so dainty in their nightdress, so diverting, so darling. Parents walked with their children and both, the

parents as well as the children, felt good.

January 1915

SPRING

THE FRESH spring green looks like a green fire. Blue and green flow together into a single resonating sound. I don't think I have ever seen the world look so beautiful and felt so content. How good it felt to be able to walk on the craggy stones. The surface of the earth felt like my secret brother. The plants had eyes that cast gazes full of love and friendship. The bushes spoke in a sweet voice and the lovely melancholy-happy birdsong rang out from everywhere. In the evenings, it was mysteriously beautiful in the fir forests — the firs standing there like fantastic creatures, so noble, so majestic, so delicate. Their branches were like arms earnestly pointing this way and that. How nice the sunlight was on cheery, bright mornings, almost too nice. It turned me into a little child again every time, in all that happiness, surrounded by all that color. I almost wanted to fold my hands together into a trusting prayer. "How beautiful the world is," I said silently to myself again and again. Standing on the hill I looked down at the charmingly shimmering plains, at the city with its pretty buildings and streets, and little figures were moving through the streets: They were my fellow citizens. It was all so peaceful and so charming, so clear and so rich in secrets. Oh, how beautiful it was on the cliffs above the lake, which was like a gentle smile in its color and outline — a smile containing the best will in the world and the most graceful goodness, a smile that can only be smiled by lovers, who always have a certain similarity to children. I always walked along the same path, and every time it seemed entirely new. I never tired of delighting in the same things and glorying in the same things. Is the sky not always the same, are love and goodness not always the same? The beauty met me with such silence. Conspicuous things and inconspicuous things held hands with each other like children of the same mother. What was important melted away, and I devoted undivided attention to the most unimportant things and was very happy doing so. In this way the days, week, months went by and the year ran quickly round, but the new year looked much the same as the previous one and again I felt happy.

January 1915

A SCHOOLBOY'S DIARY

AS A SECONDARY-SCHOOL student it is truly time to think about life a little more seriously. So: That is what I will attempt to do now.

One of our teachers is named Wächli. I have to laugh whenever I think about Wächli; he really is too funny. He always boxes our ears, but these strange boxings of the ear do not hurt at all. The man has never learned how to hit in a way you can really feel. He is the most sweet-tempered, jolly person in the world, and how we torment him! It is not gallant. We schoolboys are decidedly not noble creatures; we lack the beautifully proper social graces many times over. Why is it that we overwhelm precisely a Wächli with our jokes? We are cowards; we deserve an Inquisitor to discipline us. If Wächli is happy and contented, just then is when we behave in such a way that his cheerful, satisfied mood has no choice but to depart immediately. Is that good and right? Hardly. If he gets mad we just laugh at him. There are people who are so funny when they get mad! Wächli definitely seems to belong to this category. He makes use of the cane very seldom; he rarely gets so angry that he needs to reach for this vile implement. He is tall and fat in shape and his face is tinted purplish red. What else should I say about this Wächli? In general, I would say, he picked the wrong line of work. He should have been a beekeeper or something along those lines. I feel sorry for him.

Blok (that's our French teacher's name) is a tall, scraggly man with an unsympathetic nature. He has thick lips and eyes that one might also call thick and puffy; they look like his lips. He talks cruelly and fluently. I hate that. I am a good student otherwise, but with Blok I have primarily only failures to report. But he's the one who ruins class for me. You'd have to be a hardy fellow to do well with Blok. He never loses his temper. How painful that is for us schoolboys: to feel that we are totally incapable of annoying this leather satchel of a man in any way. He is like a wax statue and there is something creepy and horrible about that. He must have a deeply hateful character and a ghastly family life. God save a boy from a father like that. My father is a jewel: I feel that especially vividly when I look at Blok. How stiffly he always stands there: It is as though he was half made of wood and half made of iron. If you can't come up with any answers in his class, he makes fun of you. Other teachers would at least get mad. That's good for a student, since you expect it. Honest fury makes a good impression on a boy. But no, he just stands there coldly, this Blok, and pronounces his praise or blame. His praise is slimy, it doesn't warm you at all; you have no idea what to do with his criticism, coming as it does from a totally dry and indifferent mouth. In Blok's class, you curse school. And he's not a real teacher at all. A teacher who doesn't understand how to touch people's souls… But what am I talking about? The fact is, Blok is my French teacher. It's sad, but it's a fact.

Neumann, nicknamed Neumeli: Who can keep from rolling with laughter when describing this teacher? Neumann is our gym teacher and simultaneously our penmanship teacher; he has red hair and gloomy, careworn, sharp facial features. He is a very, very unhappy man maybe. He always gets so insanely angry. We have him completely under our thumbs; he is completely in our power. People such as him instill no respect, only occasionally fear, namely when they seem like they're about to go out of their minds with rage. He cannot keep himself under even the slightest bit of control, instead all his feelings seem to plunge down into a pit of anger at the slightest opportunity. Of course we do give him reasons to get angry. But why does he have such ridiculous red hair? Such an excessively henpecked manner? One of my classmates is named Junge; he says he wants to be a cook when he grows up. This Junge has a wonderfully pronounced backside. Whenever he has to do forward bends, Junge's backside sticks out even more crazily. You laugh when that happens, and Neumann has a terrible hatred for students laughing. It really is something dreadful — such total, intermingling and interringing classroom laughter. When a whole class laughs out loud like that, what kind of means should a teacher use to quiet it? Dignity? That's no use. Someone like Neumann has no real dignity. I like gym class very much and I want to kiss dear Junge. Immoderate laughter is so pleasant. I am nice to Junge; I like him very much. We go for lots of walks together, and when we do we talk about what real life has in store for us.

Wyß the rector is as tall as a tree trunk and holds himself like a soldier. We fear and respect him; these two upstanding feelings are a bit boring. I can no longer imagine the rector of a progymnasium as being anything other than just like Rector Wyß. Incidentally, he has an excellent understanding of corporal punishment. He takes you across his knee and thrashes terribly but not quite barbarically away. The blows from Wyß have something proper and fitting about them; while you are tasting his lash you have the pleasant feeling that this is a reasonable, just punishment. Nothing horrific happens. The man who knows how to beat a student so masterfully must be to a certain extent humane. I believe that too.

A very strange figure and a rare example of teacherhood, it seems to me, is Herr Jakob, the geography teacher. He is like a hermit or a brooding old poet. He is more than seventy years old and has big, shining eyes. He is a handsome, splendid old man. His beard reaches down to his breast. Think of all the things this breast must have felt and fought for! I, as a schoolboy, find myself unintentionally trying to

imagine it and so I share in his experience in my thoughts. It is truly monstrous to think how many boys this man has already inculcated with the noble art of geography. Many of these boys are already grown men by now; they are long since right in the middle of life and some of them might have been able to put their geographical knowledge to use. The map hangs on the wall right next to old Herr Jakob — we call him Kobi, by the way — so that it's utterly impossible now to picture Jakob without his accompanying map. There stands torn, multicolored, variously shaped Europe; big broad Russia, far-reaching Asia, dainty Japan like a bird with a beautiful tail, Australia hurled up out of the ocean; India and Egypt and Africa, which feels dark and unexplored to you even on the disembodied map; finally North and South America and the two mysterious poles. Yes, I have to say, I love geography class with a passion and I learn the lessons there without needing to try at all. It is as though my mind is a ship captain's mind: It goes that smoothly. And old Herr Jakob understands so well how to make the class interesting by weaving in adventurous stories he has read about and experienced in person! His old, big eyes roll meaningfully back and forth, and it seems like this man has seen every country and every ocean on earth with his own eyes. There is no other class that fills us students to bursting with sympathetic imagining in the same way. There we really experience something every time; there we sit quietly and listen; obviously — an old, wise person is talking to us and that automatically makes you pay attention. Thank God that in this progymnasium we don't have any young teachers. That would be unbearable. What can a young man who has barely seen anything of life himself have to communicate and impart? A person like that could only give a cold, superficial knowledge, unless he is a rare exception and knows how to be captivating with his mere presence. To be a teacher: It's a hard job, that's for sure. God, we schoolboys are so demanding. How abominable we are really! We even make fun of old Herr Jakob now and then. Then he gets terribly angry, and I don't know anything more sublime than the rage of this old schoolmaster. He trembles horribly in all his fragile limbs, and afterwards we're involuntarily ashamed of ourselves for having worked him up and made him angry.

Our drawing teacher is named Lanz. Lanz should be our dancing instructor: He can hop back and forth so magnificently. Speaking of which: Why don't we get any dance instruction? It seems to me they don't do anything to teach us grace, posture, and good behavior. We are real brats and likely to stay that way. But back to Lanz: He is the youngest and most confident of all our teachers. He believes we respect him. I hope the idea makes him happy. Incidentally, he has

absolutely no sense of humor. He's not a schoolteacher, he's an animal trainer; he should work for the circus. Hitting us gives him, as far as we can tell, spiritual pleasure. That is brutal: reason enough for us to tease him and despise him. His predecessor, old Herr Häuselmann, nicknamed Hüseler, was a pig; one day he had to stop teaching. This Hüseler permitted himself some very peculiar things. I myself can still feel on my cheek his old, bony, repulsive hand, with which he used to stroke and caress us boys in class. Then, when he took the liberty of doing what no pen can describe, he was removed from his position. Now we have Lanz. One was an abomination, but this one is vain and uncouth. Not a teacher! No real teacher could be so taken with himself.

Our brashest and most hilarious classmate is named Fritz Kocher. This Kocher stands up from the school bench, usually in math class, mutely raises his index finger in the air, and asks Herr Bur, the math teacher, if he may please be excused: He has the runs. Bur says that he knows what Fritz Kocher means by his runs, and tells him to just sit down. We others all laugh dreadfully loud, of course, and — miracle of miracles! — here's a teacher who simply laughs along with us. And strangely: that fills us practically on the spot with respect and affection for this rare man. We stop laughing, because Bur understands brilliantly how to bring our attention back to serious matters. His teacherly seriousness has something captivating about it, and I think it's because Bur is a man of extraordinarily strong and upright character. We listen eagerly to his words, since he seems almost mysteriously intelligent to us; also he never gets mad, on the contrary he is always lively, happy, and cheerful, which gives us the happy feeling that this man finds his classroom duties pleasant. That flatters us mightily, and we think that we should feel grateful to him for not seeing us as tormenting spirits who embitter his life, and so we behave ourselves. How funny he can be when he wants to be! But we also feel in such cases that he is acting a little for our benefit, to let us have some innocent fun. We see that he is practically an artist; we can tell that he respects us. He is a truly great guy. And you grasp and learn so much in his class! He knows how to give the most disembodied, abstract things shape and sense and content, so that it's a real pleasure. He likes Fritz Kocher for how unbelievably bold his crazy ideas are, while another teacher would curse and persecute him. That seems important to me: that such a competent, experienced man can sympathize with rascally behavior. He must have a great and noble soul, Bur. He possesses goodness and serenity. He also has a lot of energy. He turns almost all of us into sharp little arithmetickers in a relatively short time. And he treats the more stupid students among us

gently. It would never occur to us to pester this Bur; his behavior never even lets us so much as think of such a thing.

Herr von Bergen used to be our gym teacher, now he is an insurance agent. I hope he does well! He could probably tell that he wasn't cut out to be an educator. A highly elegant appearance. But what does a schoolboy care about well-tailored pants and flattering jackets? He wasn't bad, incidentally; only he liked to give out "canes" a little too much. A butcher's son always had to hold his poor little paw out to Herr von Bergen for a sharp, severe caning. I can still remember, and only too clearly, how that infuriated me. I could have chopped off that finely dressed, perfumed torturer's head myself.

I would like to end my portrait gallery of notable teachers with Doctor Merz. Merz seems to be, out of all the teachers, the most cultured; he even writes books. But that does not stop his students from finding him ridiculous sometimes. He is our history teacher and also our German teacher; he has an exaggeratedly elevated idea of everything classical. Now and then his behavior is also classical. He wears boots as though about to ride off into battle, and in fact real battles often do take place in his German class. He is short and unassuming, physically; with the artillery boots on top of that, you have to laugh. "Sit down, Junge. F!" Junge sits down, and Herr Merz writes out a cruel, report-card-disfiguring F. One time he even gave the whole class a big universal F, and on top of that screamed: "So, you are insubordinate, you little scamps? You dare to refuse me? Moser, are you the ringleader here? Yes or no?" Moser — a brave boy, we practically worship him — stands up and says in an outraged, unspeakably funny tone of voice that, well, he wouldn't call himself the ringleader. We die from laughter, then come back to life again and die a second time. Merz, though, seems to have lost his classical reason; he conducts himself like an insane person, dashes his erudite head against the wall in despair, waves his hands around, and screams: "You make my life hell, you ruin my lunch, you drive me crazy, you scoundrels! Admit it: You're out for my blood!" And he throws himself down flat on the floor. It's horrible! You wouldn't have thought it was possible. And we, who ruin and oversalt his lunch, we also receive from him the noblest and most stimulating ideas. When he tells us about the ancient Greeks, his eyes shine behind his glasses. We are definitely very unjust to bring this man to such wild outbursts. The sublime and the ridiculous are united in him, the high and the stupid, the superb and the pitiful. What can we do about the fact that a grade of F has no special power to scare us? Are we obligated to die of sacred reverence whenever one of us has to recite "Das Glück von

Edenhall" by Ludwig Uhland? "Sit down, that's an F for you!" That's how it goes in German class. How will it go in later life? I wonder.

December 1908; 1914

HANSWURST

THERE he is, they call him Hanswurst because he is such a stupid lump, no good for anything. I know him well, this dissolute and idiotic young man. I have never in my life run across anyone to whom I would more readily say, "You are a scoundrel," and also none who has so compelled me to laugh at him. If stupid and unhealthy ideas earned interest he would be a rich man, but the truth is, he is poor as a country mouse. A sparrow has greater prospects of making something of itself in the world than he does, and yet he knows nothing but good cheer, and it has never once been granted me to discover a hint of displeasure in his rascally face. One time, someone wanted to help him advance, but Hanswurst took flight from advancement as though from a calamity — that's how dumb he acted in the most important moment of his life. He is and always will be a child, a blockhead unable to tell the important from the unimportant, the valuable from the worthless. Or maybe, in the end, he is smarter than he himself realizes and has more wit than he himself is capable of acknowledging? Remain, dear question, nice and unanswered, I beg of you. In any case, Hanswurst is happy in his own skin. He has no future, but also doesn't want any such thing. What will become of him? Say a little prayer for him! He's too dumb to.

1914

SCHOOL VISIT

NOW DIDN'T the schoolchildren of a certain village get quite a surprise recently? Someone came walking down the street with bouncing steps; he came to a stop before the schoolhouse, knocked, and introduced himself to the surprised, questioning teacher. She led him inside and offered him a chair; down he sat. How? With great gravity and still at the same time very simply, as though he had the most extensive imaginable practice visiting schools. He was visibly pleased. Who doesn't like to see a gaggle of schoolchildren sitting happily at their desks? And the little ones, for their part, enjoyed this uneveryday character too. How attentively he looked at them, like he was giving them a test! What was the purpose of his visit? Again and again he smiled. Apparently he did so out of a kind of sympathy for the instruction, and then again probably for no other reason than that the children were smiling at him too. How cozy the classroom and the

lesson seemed to him! He liked all of it: the brownish clay, the coarsely rural old-fashioned hue, the snug little room, the large stove, the diagrams and the few pictures on the wall, the way the teacher taught, but especially the adorable, clever, thinking and listening little faces, the little hands, the jolly expressions, the naïve gestures and the eyes and the speaking voices. What was the subject? First, math. It went like clockwork. Only one disproportionately overgrown boy got stuck, but the kindly teacher helped him as affectionately as a mother would have. It was lovely to see how happy the children were when they realized that she had truly understood and fulfilled her duties. How free and easy, pure and open young souls are. The stranger was simply enchanted by the innocent, proper movements and gestures. Was it not possible that the children thought he was a school inspector? Presumably. Then it was time for singing, no first came reciting poems in the charming local dialect. That was great. Every last one of them could say it perfectly. The teacher called forth the childish eagerness, intelligence, and abilities of her charges almost like a sorceress. Her work seemed easy, but the observer remarked to himself that there must be a lot of effort, a lot of prior organizing and leading, great patience, and much self-sacrificing consideration and insight lying behind this smoothly functioning, well-rounded perfection. She took everything that happened with such beautiful relaxed calm; she was clearly a master, and the man who had come to pay this visit esteemed her highly. At a single word from her, the boys and girls put away their slates, books, and pencil cases. “You may go now.” As they filed out, they held out their hands to their teacher, one student after the other; some of them held out their hands to me too. So then was it I who had paid a visit to the school on this occasion? Can it really be true? Oh yes, it most certainly can.

February 1921

HAT-CHITTI

AS BOYS we all used to play a game that truth be told was utterly mean-spirited, nasty, and wicked, which we called hat-chitti (furious anger over a hat). A boy’s hat would be snatched off his head in the most devious way and thrown into the bushes. “I see!” he would say, “I’m not going to pick up that hat,” and he would walk home, or at least halfway home, next to the boy who had done him this small or large injustice, feeling chittious, or, as they say in proper English, furious. After he had walked for some time feeling good and angry, without saying a word, he would finally think better of it and turn around and go back to the place where his poor hat was lying, where he “preferred” to pick it up meekly and quietly “after all” and put it

properly back on his head, during which proceedings his fury, stemming from wounded pride, knew absolutely no bounds. Now if he went back to that rascal the other boy, he would be horribly laughed at for his desperate, out-of-control rage or chitti, which so exacerbated the humiliation under which he was already suffering that he would practically break in two from chitti.

Oh, how terrible this chitti is! Grim inner hatred and deep quiet rage are very, very bad things. Not only boys can bear grudges against other boys in such a way, so too just as well can grown-ups against grown-ups, mature adults against mature adults, and, I would venture to say, nations against nations. A vengeance or revenge can collect in the heart of a nation due to self-regard that has been injured in various ways, and it grows and grows, without end, becomes more and more pressing, more and more painful, rises up like a high mountain no longer to be cleared away, obstructs any mutual understanding, inhibits warm, healthy, reasonable reciprocal communication, turns into twitching nervous fury, and is so tyrannical and degrading that it can one day no longer be reined in and cries out wildly for bloody conflict. That is how wars arise between nations that could have a wonderful friendship with each other if only the one nation could get over the humiliation it has received and the other refrain from reminding the first of the wound, humiliation, and insult it has been given. Yes, that is chitti, hat-chitti: unburied inner hatred; it will not be soothed, cannot be stilled, cannot sleep, and that, don't you think, my dear fellow human beings, that is sad, that is wicked.

November 1915

THE ROWBOAT

I THINK I have already described this scene but I want to write it again. In a rowboat in the middle of a lake sit a man and a woman. The moon is high overhead in the dark sky. The night is still and warm, perfectly suited to this dreamy, amorous adventure. Is the man in the boat a kidnapper? Is the woman the happily captivated kidnappee? That we do not know; we see only how the two of them kiss each other. The dark mountain lies like a giant in the glittering water. A castle or manor house stands on the shore with one lit window. No noise, no sound. Everything is sheathed in sweet black silence. The stars flicker high in the sky and also up from far below in the sky that lies reflected in the water. The water is the moon's lover, she has pulled it toward her and now they are kissing, the water and the moon, like lover and beloved. The beautiful moon has plunged into the water like a bold young prince into the thick of battle. It is reflected in the water the way a beautiful, loving heart is reflected in

another heart longing greedily for love. It is magnificent, the way the moon is like a lover, drowning in pleasures, and the way the water is like the happy beloved, hugging and clasping the neck of her royal darling. The man and the woman in the boat are perfectly quiet. A long kiss holds them captive. The rudder sits carelessly on the water. Does it make them happy, will it make them happy, the two of them there in that boat, the two of them kissing, the two of them lit by the light of the moon, the two of them loving each other?

1914

ASCENT BY NIGHT

EVERYTHING seemed so strange, as though I had never seen it before and were seeing it now for the first time in my life. I was taking a train through the mountains. It was twilight and the sun was so beautiful. The mountains seemed so big and so powerful to me, and they were too. Hills and valleys make a country rich and great, they win it space. The mountainous nature struck me as extravagant, with its towering rock formations and beautiful dark forests soaring upward. I saw the narrow paths snaking around the mountains, so graceful, so rich in poetry. The sky was clear and high, and men and women were walking along the paths. The houses sat so still, so lovely on the hillsides. The whole thing seemed to me like a poem, a majestic old poem, passed down to posterity eternally new. Then it grew darker. Soon the stars were gleaming down into the deep dark chasms and a white shining moon had stepped forth into the sky. The road that ran through the valley was as white as snow. A deep joy took hold of me. I was happy to be in the mountains. And the pure, fresh, cold air. How splendid it was. I breathed it in with passion. And so the train rolled slowly on, and eventually I got off the train. I surrendered my things and continued on foot, up into the mountains. It was so bright and at the same time so black. The night was divine. Tall fir trees towered up before me and I heard springs gurgling and murmuring, it was such a precious melody, such a mysterious saying and singing. I myself sang a song into the night as I ascended ever higher on the bright road. The road came to a village, then went on through an absolutely dark forest. I bumped into roots and stones with my feet, and since I had lost the straight path I often banged my wanderer's head into trees, hard. But I could only laugh about that. Oh, how magnificent it was, this first ascent by night! Everything so quiet. There was something holy about everything. The sight of the black fir trees made me deeply happy. It was midnight when I reached the little dark house up in the high valley; there was light in the window. Someone was waiting for me. How beautiful that is: to reach

a desolate natural spot at high altitude in a silent rustling night, on foot, like a traveling, wildly racing journeyman, and to know that you are awaited by someone dear to you. I knocked. A dog started barking, so loud that it echoed far and wide. I heard someone hurry down the stairs. The door was opened. Someone held up the lamp or lantern in front of my face. I was recognized, oh how beautiful it was, it was so beautiful—

1914

ADVENTURE ON A TRAIN

ONCE I took a train trip where I was sitting all alone in a compartment, like a contemplative hermit in his silent, secluded cloister. The train stopped at some station, the doors were flung open with an abruptness befitting an official of the railways, and into the strange room on wheels where I was stepped a woman. It was no different for me than when sunshine enters a night-black carriage, so bright did this adorable feminine apparition seem to me, approaching as though especially to see me. She said a friendly good evening. Who was gladder to hear it than I? The train started moving again forthwith and out into the night and the unknown land was borne the chamber in which there were two persons sitting now, looking at each other with friendly gazes. A smile gave rise to a word, and while the wheels clattered industriously on and on I had already, like a rogue and a thief, perceived the proper opportunity and I sat at her side and put my arm around her enchanting figure. The wheels were busily working and regions I did not know flew past us two happy people, outside in the quiet dead of night. I was busily working with my lips upon hers, which were exquisite, like a child's lips. One kiss unleashed the next, one kiss followed the last. I took my time with this sweet business and turned into an artist of kissing, an artist of caressing. Oh, how the dear, sweet woman smiled at me with her beautiful mouth and with her beautiful dark eyes, which, as they looked into mine, kissed me. Paradisiacal wantonness lay upon her lips, paradisiacal pleasure shone from her eyes. I, meanwhile, had already learned very well how to manage things so as to get the greatest excitement from a kiss and to put the highest pleasure into it. Beneath our lusty lovemaking, the wheels clattered ever onward, and the train hurtled through the land, and the two of us held each other in our arms like saints in the embrace of the supernatural spheres, cheek pressed to cheek and body against body, as though we had previously been two separate thoughts but were now one single one. How happy it made me that what I was doing made this sweet creature happy. To quench her blissful thirst for love made me the happiest of mortal creatures,

made me a god. But now the train has stopped again, and the most ravishing of women has disembarked, while I had to keep riding.

1914

APOLLO AND DIANA

I WAS, I remember, employed at the brewery in Thun. About ten years ago it must have been, and I had the good fortune to be living in a lovely, spacious old house right next to the magnificent castle on Castle Hill. I drank a lot of beer, as my brewing job quite naturally tempted me to do, went swimming in the surging Aare, and often went for walks in the lowlands surrounding Thun, staring up in amazement at those colossi, the mountains, which towered up into the sky like monstrous fortresses. One day I had an exciting little titillating experience with my landlady, the clerk's wife, and in fact it was because of a picture I had hanging on the wall of my room. This room was comfort, coziness, and homeyness itself. I will never forget this sap-green-tinged room, pretty as a picture, but nor will I forget the sunbeams, so golden and at the same time so crafty, smiling their way into this hidden chamber. But now to the clerk's wife. She took the picture, a photograph of Cranach's painting *Apollo and Diana* (the original hangs in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin), off the wall where it had been hanging for my amusement and delight and put it, prudishly and accusingly facedown, on my table. I came home and immediately noticed with my two ever-attentive eyes the work of this false sense of morality, and I quickly and with determination seized hold of the quill waiting ready for service at all times and wrote the following cheeky note: "Dear Madam, Has the picture, which I like, since it consists of nothing but pure beauty, perhaps done you some sort of harm, so that you felt compelled to remove it from the wall? Do you find it ugly? Are you of the opinion that it is not a respectable picture? In that case, may I most humbly ask you simply not to dignify it with another look. But perhaps, my dear madam, you would permit me to dispose as I see fit of the property I hold to be mine and place the picture once more in the place it once occupied. I will affix it back onto the wall at once and I feel certain that it will not be taken down again." The clerk's wife read and took away the note. What a scoundrel I was! To write such hard words to such a lovable woman. Still, these few words — what a great effect they had. How affectionate the clerk's wife was to me from that moment on. She was charming, charming. She even requested my torn pants so that she could mend them — she, the clerk's wife.

1914

A STORY

A YOUNG woman and a young man were very unhappy. He was supposed to carry her off, but couldn't quite bring himself to do it. She wanted to be carried off, but had a vague feeling that it would turn out to be rather difficult. I do not know what era this story takes place in, anyway, the time came, the hour struck, it was night (obviously), the wind blew, the forest nearby was pitch black. Actually the moon should have been shining but unfortunately this was not the case. What did our lovers do? They looked at each other long and hard, with doubt and apprehension in their eyes. Finally they hurried off, but it was as though they were hurrying away from their unknowing, and toward what? They reached the open field, the grass gave off its scent, it was harvest time. They were already getting tired and somewhat bored. Elopings were usually always so exciting, intoxicating, hearts pounding, expectations mounting uncontrollably. But this one was different. When they reached the forest and sat down on the ground, they heard noises from this direction and that, as though someone were coming, but no one came. Nothing happened, except that the fir trees swayed, the needles whispered, the leaves rustled, the branches creaked, a screech owl softly cried, and above the trees twinkled the stars. A feeling of acceptance came over them both at that moment, and they said to each other that it would be better if they turned back. Everything would stay just the way it was, and that would be the most beautiful thing of all. They decided it was a good idea to return home, and on their way home they smiled. A dog barked, otherwise all was quiet, and now the moon came out, as though arriving on the scene to endorse their decision. As if pleased with their self-denial. They wanted to renounce everything and in future be nothing but dutiful and obedient, no longer thirsting for adventure, but virtuous and honest instead, no longer stupid, but intelligent instead, no longer fractious and restive, but well-behaved instead, no longer high-spirited, but also no longer indecisive. "Tomorrow morning I will play for my edification a piece on the piano," she said, and he said something too. They loved each other no less as a result of their abortive elopement — in fact, true love began only then. Now, for the first time, they grew close. Now that they were no longer thinking of outward appearances, inner feelings were born. They now laughed, held each other close, kissed, were gargantuanly good to each other, all as a matter of course. Before, each had imposed on the other the burden of being frightfully courageous, of underestimating the peace and calm of everyday life. Now that they had calmed down and no longer wanted to do anything extravagant, their inclinations burst forth like freckles, they were

satisfied, took each other home, and thought that being a little patient before they got engaged was actually rather nice. When they arrived back home, someone was standing there, who asked them, “Well then, are you agreed?” They answered, “Yes, we are.” And so our story has reached a happy conclusion — that’s the main thing, now the weather will be nice tomorrow.

August 1921

THE NEW NOVEL

EXCEPTIONALLY estimable, good, nice, dear people they all were but they all, unluckily, kept asking me about the new novel, and that was excruciating.

Whenever I met an estimable friend on the street, he said and asked, “How’s your new novel coming? Countless avid readers are rejoicing in advance and are already eager to see your new novel. You were nice enough to let on that you’re writing a new novel, were you not? Hopefully it’ll be out soon, the new novel.”

Unhappy me, deplorable wretched me!

Of course I had dropped all kinds of hints. It’s true. I had been unwise and imprudent enough to let on that a new big novel was flowing forth under my quill or nib.

And now it was me in the inky blackness. Lost!

Ghastly was my condition, monstrous my state.

I went out in public and I heard from this corner and that corner: “So when is your new powerful novel finally coming out?”

I was almost ready to keel over.

“If only it had never crossed my mind to let on that a new novel was budding and blossoming!” a voice full of despair cried out within me.

My vexation was as great as my shame. Only by overcoming a kind of horror did I still dare now and then to show my face in the houses whose conveniences and hospitalities had once enchanted me.

To my publisher, estimable from every point of view, I had become nothing less than the bull’s-eye in the cross-hairs of the highest-caliber worries. Whenever I sat in his office he looked at me steadily, sadly, and deeply crestfallen as though I were a horrible child. Anyone can easily understand how maddening that was.

To the most estimable person in the world I had become the object of melancholy meditations.

Kindly, despondently, in a soft, still, graveside voice as though talking about matters irredeemably hopeless, he asked:

“How’s your new high-caliber novel coming?”

“It’s making progress, slowly; it’s coming along,” I tonelessly

answered.

Not even I believed what I was saying, and the most estimable of persons believed it just as little as I did. His smile was tired, flat, and full of resignation.

Those and suchlike smiles are smiled only by someone who wants to convey that he has decided to forego everything splendid in the world.

One time he said:

"If you aren't bringing me your new successful novel then there's little or no point in coming to see me at all. The sight of a novelist who, instead of actually delivering his new capacious novel, only ever promises to deliver it, pains me, and for this reason I would ask you to put off visiting my office until you are in a position to lay your new and good novel on my desk."

I was shattered.

"Oh, if only I had never let on that a new, respectable novel was arising within me! Alas, that it ever decided to cross my mind to promise what I could not deliver and lay on the table! If only I had nevermore given anyone to understand that a novel as beautiful as it is exciting and long-winded would be in the offing and presumably available in bookstores rather soon!"

This I cried out loud, this was my lament. I felt reduced to nothing.

How abundantly I had come to know the misery it is a novel-writer's lot to experience when he more faithfully promises to deliver his new, astounding, and gripping novel than he in fact truly puts it on the table and delivers it, who lets on about it and holds out the prospect of it more than he writes it.

I could no longer show my face in public among the estimable people who are in the habit of asking a novelist about his new novel. But I soon brought this oppressive, lamentable condition to a sudden end by one day so to speak scramming and hitting the road.

1918

THE LETTER

WITH A letter in my pocket that the mailman had brought me and that I had not had the courage to open, I walked with slow, deliberate footsteps up the mountain into the forest. The day was like a charming prince dressed in blue. Everywhere, it chirped and blossomed and bloomed and was green and fragrant. The world looked as though it could only have been created for tenderness, friendship, and love. The blue sky was like a kindly eye, the gentle wind a loving caress. The woods were thicker and darker and soon

brighter again, and the green was so fresh and new, so sweet. Then I stopped on the clean, yellowish path, pulled out the letter, broke the seal, and read the following:

"She who feels compelled to tell you that your letter surprised her more than it pleased her does not desire you to write to her again; she is amazed that you found the courage to permit yourself such familiarity even once, and she hopes that with this act of bold, foolhardy recklessness the matter will be permitted to rest once and for all. Has she ever once given you any sign that could possibly have been interpreted to mean that she wished to learn what you felt for her? Uninteresting as they appear to her, the secrets of your heart leave her utterly cold; she possesses not the slightest understanding for the outpourings of a love that means nothing to her, and thus she begs you to let yourself be guided by the knowledge of how good a reason you have to keep an appropriate distance from the sender of this letter. In relationships that are destined to remain on a solely respectable level, every warmth, you will surely agree, must remain categorically forbidden."

I slowly refolded the letter containing such sad and demoralizing tidings, and while doing so I cried out: "How good and friendly and sweet you are, Nature! Your earth, your meadows and forests, how beautiful they are! And, God in Heaven, how hard your people are."

I was shaken, and never before had the woods seemed as beautiful to me as they seemed at that moment.

1918

THE ITALIAN NOVELLA

I HAVE strong cause to doubt if readers will enjoy a story like this about two people, two little people, namely a charming nice young woman and an honest good and in his own way at least just as nice young man who enjoyed the most lovely and heartfelt relations of friendship with each other. The tender and passionate love they felt, each for the other, was like the summer sun in terms of heat and like decembral snow in terms of purity and chastity. Their kind mutual intimacy seemed unshakable, and their fiery, innocent inclination toward each other grew from day to day like a wonderful plant rich in color and as rich in perfume. Nothing seemed able to disturb this very sweetest of conditions and very most beautiful trust, and everything would have been nice and perfect if only the honest good dear and young man were not deeply familiar with the Italian novella. His precise knowledge of the beauty, splendor, and magnificence of the Italian novella turned him, however, as the perceptive reader will soon see, into a real numskull, temporarily robbed him of half his

healthy common sense, and caused, forced, and necessitated him one day, morning, or evening, at eight, two, or seven o'clock, to say to his beloved in a dull voice, "Hey, listen, I have something to tell you, something that has oppressed, plagued, and tormented me for the longest time, something that will make perhaps both of us unhappy. I cannot keep it from you — I must, I must tell you. Gather up all your courage and fortitude. It may happen that these dreadful and frightful tidings will kill you. Oh, I want to give myself a thousand resounding slaps on the face and tear out my hair." The poor girl fearfully cried out, "You've never been like this before. What is torturing you and racking you with pain? What is this dreadfulness that you have kept secret from me until now and now have to confide in me? Out with your words on the spot, so that I may know what there is to fear and what there is still, somehow, to hope. I do not lack the courage to endure what is most difficult and bear what is most extreme."—She who spoke these words trembled throughout her whole body, of course, with fear, and her unease spread a deathly pallor over all the charms of her face, otherwise so fresh and pretty. "Listen and learn," the young man said, "that I am alas only too thoroughly expert in the Italian novella, and that precisely this knowledge is our undoing."—"What do you mean, for God's sake?" asked the pitiful young woman, "How is it possible that education and knowledge could make us miserable and destroy our happiness?" At which point it pleased him to reply: "Because the style of the Italian novella is unique in its beauty and vitality, and because our love has no such style to show for itself. This thought makes me miserable, and I am no longer able to believe in any happiness." Both of the good young people let their heads, their little heads, hang down for apx. 10 minutes or a bit longer, and were completely taken aback and adrift. But little by little they regained their composure and their lost faith and they returned to their senses. They picked themselves up from their mournful and dispirited state, looked each other affectionately in the eye, smiled, held hands, cuddled up close, were happier and friendlier than ever before, and said, "We want to take joy and pleasure in each other, now as before, despite all the style and splendor of the Italian novella, and tenderly love each other as we once did. We want to be modestly satisfied and not worry about any exemplary models that could only rob us of our own tastes and natural enjoyment. To be bound to each other simply and truly and be warm and good is better than the most beautiful, distinguished style, which can go hang as far as we're concerned, right?" With these merry words they kissed each other in the most heartfelt way, laughed at their laughable dejection, and were once again satisfied.

1917

CASEMAN AND HOUSEMAN

AN ENERGETIC, well-known publisher, enterprising as he was, said to Caseman the writer one fine day: “My dear Caseman, pack your suitcase immediately, or your briefcase, or your cosmetics case for all I care, and without deliberating for a long time beforehand set out for Japan. Got it?” The quick and nimble Caseman, having decided on the spot to carrying out this flattering assignment, did not take ten minutes to think it over but simply got a move on, packed all his thoughts and implements into his carrying case, boarded the train, and steamed, journeyed, and drove off to the famous and remarkable land of Japan. The publisher, or publishing man, telephoned an important newspaper man to ask if he would be so kind as to put in his paper that Caseman had packed his case and flown off and slipped away to Japan. Before long, another publisher or publishing man read about it and asked Houseman, the writer, to come see him as quickly as he could, for he had something important to tell him. Houseman was rather busy delivering a polite and wide-ranging address to his cat, and also sipping his tea, and smoking a cigarette, when the letter arrived announcing that he should hurry forthwith to his publisher because he, the publisher, had something important to tell him, Houseman. He put on his best suit, brushed, scrubbed, combed, washed, and adorned his respective parts in the appropriate ways, and marched calmly and coolly to see his businessman. “My dear Houseman,” the publishing man said to Houseman, “I know you are a quiet, tranquil person who values his peace and calm! But now you must emerge from your cozy cocoon and fly with all possible haste, promptitude, and disquiet to Turkey! Caseman’s publisher has dispatched Caseman to Japan, and so I, my dear Houseman, must send you to Turkey. Understood?” Houseman did not, however, understand quite so easily; he did not possess the easy and nimble quickness of mind of a Caseman. He asked for a week to think it over and went back home where, as cheerful as he was thoughtful, he sat down on his old trunk, which started sighing and groaning under the weight, as trunks so often do in these circumstances. Houseman loved the quiet and peaceful hours he spent in this house of his and could not bring himself to say goodbye to said house. “I cannot bring myself to say goodbye to this house, and my trunk is old, it would pain me to send it on such a long journey,” Houseman wrote to his businessman. “I have considered the situation and I ask you to understand and rest assured that I cannot travel to Turkey. I am not the man for the job. I have just spent half an hour in Turkey in my mind and I found it very dull there. I would prefer to give the former Kingdom of Poland a try. Please let me know what you think. I will give you a week to consider

it. The fact is, I am simply better suited to Poland than Turkey." The publisher laughed when he read the letter and said, "That Houseman is useless."

1917

THE IDOL

A YOUNG man, about whose elegance, education, and background there could be no question, and who enjoyed the undoubtedly good fortune to be numbered among civilized people, had the following curious if not indeed frightful and horrific adventure one day on a visit to the Anthropology Museum. The young man, after looking around with all due fascination in the spacious chambers stuffed full of every imaginable object of interest, suddenly stood, he knew not how, before an ancient wooden figure, which, forbidding and ungainly as it was, made a powerful and subsequently overpowering impression on him, to such an extent that he felt himself as it were bewitched, body and soul, by the primitive idol, for such indeed it was. He couldn't breathe, his heart was pounding, his blood was coursing like a swollen, raging stream through all his veins, his hair stood on end, his limbs trembled, and he was seized all of a sudden with a monstrous, harrowing desire to throw himself onto the ground in contrition and debasement and pray, as energetically as he could, to the terrible image that had been taken from the deserts of Africa; a barbarian ecstasy percolated through his soul, blinded and robbed of all reason. He emitted a shriek that echoed direly through the spacious hall, and only just enough comprehension was left to him as was necessary to gather himself up to a certain extent with a desperate jolt from the terrifying darkness descending all around his dear bright consciousness. This he did. With extravagantly tempestuous strides, as though a blaze had burst forth behind him, and forfeiting forthwith the eager scientific interest he had so recently evinced, he sped and dashed to the doors, and only when he found himself back in the open air and saw living breathing human beings around him once more did he recover from his panicky consternation, a story that made he who had experienced it stop and deeply reflect, a story at which, however, I merely ask the reader to smile.

1914

THE COVER

I WROTE and wrote, I didn't leave my desk. Never had I written with such avidity. It was total dedication. Not one thought did I give to food, no more so to sleep. I say this to try to convey how

singlemindedly devoted I was to my task. Was I not practically a typewriter? Did I not pour my whole being into this book? More and more furiously did the closely written manuscript pages multiply. I was downright drowning in paper. Just imagine! No days off. As many overtime hours as humanly possible. Not a thought for compensation; all my thoughts were on the work itself. What did I know or care about eight-hour days? Secretly, of course, I nourished great hopes and believed certain things, such as e.g. that the book would one day be read by others with as much pleasure as it had been written with by me. It continued to swell and grow almost against my will, and yet I continued to bust my brains over it. Little by little its dimensions attained considerable extent. A colleague expressed his admiration, and sincerely too. The manuscript already weighed two and a half pounds and appeared to be growing by the hour.

All four seasons of the year had passed. There was plenty of landscape available. Oftentimes I had it rain; by no means did I stint on sunshine. Now and then I ensured some snow and afterwards spring showers. The book lacked wanderings filled with various diversions as little as it did rooms full of visitors, streets full of people, Sundays with the sounds of church bells, lakeshores in the moonlight, women having love affairs, bandits in the Apennines. Is that nothing? When the book was finished, I ran to the publisher and from there to the printer and encouraged them both to hurry. They both smiled, since they both had experience in such things.

Every author has his circle of friends and acquaintances and so I sent the book to a personage who wrote back to thank me and say that for the time being he could praise only the book's cover. Everything else he planned to partake of only when the occasion arose.

Try to feel what I felt: I was flabbergasted and, for a while, completely at a loss. This unique way of paying respect to a work of the pen made an impression on me of an experience that has shaped me and that therefore I here present to you.

January 1920

THE GREAT TALENT

ONCE UPON a time there was a great talent who sat in his room all day long, looked out the window, and acted like a total do-nothing.

The great talent knew he was a great talent, and this stupid, useless knowledge gave him food for thought all day.

People in high places had said lots of very flattering things to the poor young great talent and had, correspondingly, given him money too. In their noble bounty, wealthy people enjoy supporting a great talent from time to time, but they expect in return that Mr. God's Gift

be appropriately grateful and also well-mannered.

Our shining talent here, on the other hand, was absolutely not grateful, well-mannered, and polite. In fact, he was the exact opposite — rude.

To take money, when you are a great talent, and on top of that to be rude: that is truly the highest pinnacle of rudeness. Dear reader, I tell you: a great talent like that is a monster; and I beg of you: never contribute anything to his advancement.

Our great talent here was supposed to go genteel and well-behaved out into the world in order to entertain ladies and gentlemen in a cute and talented way, but he was heartily willing to forego such an arduous fulfillment of his duties; he would much rather sit at home, dispelling his boredom with all sorts of selfish and wayward figments of the imagination.

Miserable, despicable scoundrel! What pride, what uncharitability, what an excessive lack of humility!

Anyone who supports great talents sooner or later runs the risk of having to lay a revolver on the table in front of him close at hand in order to be able to defend himself against possible stickups with a cocked and loaded weapon.

If I'm not mistaken, a great talent once wrote his benevolent, noble-hearted sponsor the following letter:

"As you well know, I am a great talent and as such in continual need of support. Where, my dear Sir, do you get the nerve to leave me in the lurch and hence to perish? I think I have every right to more fat advances. Woe is you, unhappy wretch, if you don't send me ASAP enough for me to keep dawdling. But I am quite sure that you would never be foolhardy enough, and hence would never dare, to remain insensitive to the prospect of nefarious, predatory demands."

Such endearing letters and others like them are what every gracious donor and patron of the arts receives as time goes by, and so I cry out loud to the world: Give a great talent no gifts and grant him no grants!

Our great talent here understood that he had to produce something, but he preferred to drift around on the streets and accomplished nothing.

As time goes by, after all, a sufficiently recognized and lauded talent quite naturally becomes a very comfortable eminence on its own.

Pricked by his conscience, the great talent finally did pull himself together out of his, so to speak, talent-rich jog-trot. He abandoned himself to the world, i.e., betook himself to the road and, far from any subsidies, became himself again.

By learning to forget that anyone was duty-bound to render him

any assistance, he got used to being responsible for his own behavior once more.

A revival of integrity and a sudden impulse to be plucky now characterized him, raised him up, and these alone, people think, kept him from a miserable demise.

1918

THE WICKED WOMAN

A WOMAN who one day, as these things sometimes work out, had to see the dream of her life — the dream she had thought herself permitted to dream — dead and buried cried whole long days and weeks long over the loss of the aforesaid. But by the time she had finally cried out all her pain she had turned, almost astonishing even herself, into a mean, angry woman who from that point on had no need as deep and vital as the need to see other women properly toppled, embarrassed, and cast down through her efforts to make them unhappy. She began more and more to hate every cheerful female face, because every happy visage made her feel wounded and insulted. She felt moved to hatch plots and malicious plans against every last pleasure she caught sight of, since every jolly glance seemed to give her pain. Now is it right for an unhappy person to take his or her hatred of humanity so far? No, never! must come the resolute answer. This wicked woman, ruined by such manifold sorrow, by a striving after happiness in life that came to nothing, made it her sad task to cleverly bring young women and young men together, make them notice each other, bring them closer and closer together in friendship, and then, when their sweet friendship seemed ripe to her, tear the two of them apart again with cunning betrayals, crude tricks, cruel slander and deception. The sight of a sobbing, betrayed member of her own sex made her feel better and gave her pleasure. She did such things and others like them for quite a while, during which time the young women cheated of their joy and satisfaction continued to see her as a fine and noble lady. But little by little everyone noticed how wicked she was, and as soon as people achieved certainty on the matter her dangerous company was most rigorously avoided from then on, in such a way that the wicked woman soon had no further opportunities to cause unhappiness, do wicked deeds, and spread strife and discontent.

1917

A SON AND HIS MOTHER

A DEAR, good little mother, truly — I mean, someone should put

up a statue to her! — made, with her diligent frugality and assiduous all-night sewing, the happy opportunity come to pass for her son, whom she practically worshipped, to attend high school and thereby achieve the best possible education. And observe, dear observant reader, what happened next. The great son, this object of maternal self-sacrifice, this glittering jewel and precious gemstone of a son, indeed made such great progress over time that already in his years of young manhood he had risen high and attained a position that not only allowed him but in fact practically obligated him to puff himself up, to coldly and heedlessly act the part of the haughtiest of beings, and to play the grand gentleman, as which he quickly learned to put his poor, modest background behind him. A superbly fat, stout, highly respected beast, as they say, he felt raised up above all the narrow little cares and worries of daily life, and, as his estimation of his own important and estimable self rose higher and higher, he forgot the maternal individual of his earlier days. Poor, good little mother! Dear oh dear, she should just sit nice and quiet in her little garret of care and sorrow, since it is of course completely impossible to introduce such figures into polite society. In the rarefied atmosphere and glittering social circumstances in which parvenus live, no one, as is well known, ever says a word, even speaks a syllable, about a child's gratitude and a child's love. Sultry, pleasurable love is certainly spoken of there, but about simple love as such one merely, in the very best case, pityingly shrugs one's haughty shoulders. So if we suppose and assume that the great son of his dear little mother did feel inclined to pay her a visit at some point, we would be forced to likewise consider that such a visit would be impossible, since the splendid fellow was much too big and self-important, much too fat and puffed up, much too proud and much too rich to enter that den of poverty through the narrow, pitiful frame of the modest den door. There are palace doors, and high, wide salon doors, for such pride and such haughtiness. To say more is surely superfluous, the reader already understands what I am trying to say. The path to the little mother and thereby to modest human simplicity was and remains barred to the upstart, by reason of the doorframe and of the equally narrow circumstances to which he would have had to adapt himself once more. Perhaps I will be permitted the naturally apparently rather sentimental remark that I would be very inclined to say that I would like to kneel down before this dear little old mother and that it would practically transport me to worshipfully kiss the money that she scratched together for her proud oaf with her wearisome nocturnal labors. Let the oaf just stroll along with others like him, wherever his feet feel like taking him. I bow not before him and those like him, and for him and those like him I will never have either a courteous word

or any respect to spare whatsoever.

1917

STUDENT AND TEACHER

A TEACHER, whom his students highly respected and were even very fond of for his lively personality, one day caught one of these students doing something rascally in class, and this made him extraordinarily angry. The schoolboy who had the misfortune to incite his teacher's displeasure and direct it upon himself to such a great extent had been, until that point, the favorite pupil of the man he so rashly and deeply offended, but from then on he was in the teacher's eyes an abomination whom the teacher cruelly belittled and appallingly beat day after day in front of the whole class, treatment the enraged man promised the poor boy punctually and faithfully to continue. Doubtless the teacher was taking out a personal hatred on him, and he, the adult, was going, with respect to the child, too far. The boy, thrown so lightning-fast out of the comfy armchair of goodwill onto the hard bench of disfavor, and seeing himself so unexpectedly transformed from prize pupil into notorious criminal, did not know what to do. However, after bearing as bravely as he could for weeks the sad fate of a fallen favorite and the cruel and contemptuous treatment associated therewith, he one day, driven by necessity, took up his pen to try to bring about a change in his utterly unbearable situation and wrote to his wrathful persecutor and tormentor as follows: "I have, since I cannot confess to my parents, for I do not want to add another care to the many they already have weighing upon them, no one else to turn to but you yourself, to try, if it be possible, to gain some sort of favor with you again. Maybe this letter will cause you to stop covering me with ignominy. Since, as I already said, I cannot pour out my sorrow to my parents, I will pour it out to you. Since I do not want to ask them to take me under their protection, they who love me, I will bring my request to the one who hates me and vents his rage on me. So I ask for protection from the one before whom I seem to have been left unprotected, and I beg for mercy from the one who, because he feels offended by my conduct, treats me so mercilessly. I have the courage, as you can see, to pour out my sorrows to he who inflicts them, and confide my suffering to he who causes it. I don't like school anymore." This letter gave the teacher all sorts of things to consider and reflect upon, and he behaved more gently again with respect to the student from then on.

1917

A MODEL STUDENT

ONE OF my classmates was, even as a boy, frightfully respectable. The rest of us held him in meager esteem; his subservience repelled us. He had hardly any meat on his bones either; he was so thin he seemed transparent, and he walked around like a stick, disgustingly well-behaved and dainty. He was useless at games and jokes. You could laugh at the others, for instance Grüring, who stumbled over the poem "Firdusi," but this fellow gave no occasion for even the slightest chuckle. As a result, he barely existed, although his lankiness, a field in which he apparently strove for the utmost achievement, was certainly noticeable enough. His parents lived in the new part of town. His father was a notary public; his mother stinted as buoyantly as her exemplar of a son in exhibiting qualities of physical amplitude. The memory of his staidness pains me. Is it permissible for us human creatures to be so uninteresting? The jokes of a schoolboy everyone considered a rascal made us laugh so hard, and his renown therefor did not prevent him from turning into a fine upstanding man. Today he acts as though he had never had a hilarious thought in his life. The other one, meanwhile, was beaten for his lack of flaws. God does not evince much appreciation for human inculpability. Oh, what the so-called dumb kids gave us by way of continual entertainment! Did we thank them for it? No, but we liked them, we respected them without being impressed by them. They were worth something, while this one, the most ambitious of us all, was felt to be a total stranger. How beastly it is to be so irreproachable. Returning after a long absence to the city that had witnessed my childhood, I discovered he had experienced misfortune. His rise went before a fall, and the good opinion he enjoyed in the eyes of his fellow citizens fell with him. Even the most striking can be struck down, no?

1925

THE TALE OF THE FOUR HAPPY FELLOWS

ONCE UPON a time there were four utterly happy fellows. One of them was named Ludwig. He was lowered down on a rope. The rope broke in the process; Ludwig fell and lay on the ground. He wrote a substantial diary about his lying on the ground, in total darkness, and when the other three fellows had pulled him back up again, he showed them what he had accomplished in the meantime. They were amazed at his talent as well as his industriousness, and, as a sign of their regard, hugged him. Ludwig had been through so much while he was missing! And now all of the lines he had written in stillest stillness and darkest darkness were read. The four young fellows were, as mentioned, the happiest of boys, namely because they dwelled with their parents in paradise, a paradise called Severity.

They had to present their backs or their heads all the time for the receiving of well-aimed blows and they did so with a pleasure that can properly be labeled indescribable. They grew up in this way, among spasms and terrors, and had gotten so used to trembling that they felt it as a kind of loss when they emerged into life and unlearned their sweet trepidation. You cannot possibly imagine how capable and hardworking these four young fellows became. One after another they became generals and fought like lions. They had magnificent hair, and treated their enemies in such a fashion that the latter had good reason to be exceedingly happy when the former chose to forgive them. Who would expect such conduct from boys raised amid such thrashings? Along with the abovementioned name of Ludwig were arrayed such appellations as Hugo, Julius, and Moritz. They grew very timid and afraid of their own capable efficiency.

Perhaps that is too witty a way to put it. The truth is that they did every honor to their respective whereabouts. At home they had had to give polite thanks for blows received. Their parents considered it advisable to demand that from the scamps — but can we truly speak of scamps when all four of them grew up to be generals who fought like lions? So that the father who had given them all such a solid education would not go to rack and ruin, they sent him money, and so that the dear mama from whom her sons reaped such chastisements might not seem neglected, they carried her, whenever the occasion to do so presented itself, in their arms. Now those are some real model children, they are, don't you think! Their ears had grown long from erstwhile pullings, yet how could that have done the rascals any harm, but how can we call generals that? What an infraction, oh, oh!

How these four young fellows feared being beaten, and how they turned this fear to good use. Where fear had sat, now sat epaulettes. They who had once submitted and undergone now shrank from no power on earth. Now that is real success, don't you think? Every time they had been beaten black and blue by Father, they had had to kiss Mother's hand as a sign of their satisfaction. Now they were directing armies on the battlefield. The hundred thousand commands they issued were obeyed with burning zeal. Isn't that incredible! I am happy to have been able to tell you about these four happy fellows, and hereby confidently conclude this most sensible, intelligent essay, although you might perhaps not share that opinion of it. Please, sincerely believe in these four young fellows.

Unpublished, 1925

SUMMER IN THE COUNTRY

WHAT DO you do during a summer in the country? Good God

man, what do you need to do? You relax. You get up on the late side. Your room is very clean, although the house you occupy barely deserves the name of hut. The village streets are soft and green. Grass covers them like a green carpet. People are friendly. You don't have to think about anything. Meals are rather big. Breakfast is in a secluded garden arbor shot through with sunlight. The appetizing innkeeper carries the breakfast out in her hands, you need only reach out and take it. Bees hum around your head, which is a real summer-vacation head. Butterflies flutter from flower to flower and a kitten leaps through the grass. A wonderfully pleasant scent fills your nose. Afterward you take a walk on the edge of a little forest, the sea is deep blue and cheery brown sailboats sail over the beautiful water. Everything is beautiful. It all has a winning look. Then comes the hearty lunch, and a game of cards after lunch under the chestnut trees. In the afternoon, swimming in the water park. The waves in the pool refresh and revive you when they beat against you. The sea is now gentle, now rough. In rainstorms it offers you a splendid view. Then come the lovely quiet evenings, when the lamps are lit in the farmhouse rooms and the moon hangs high in the sky. The night is pitch black, barely pierced by any light. You never see anything as deep at that. And so one day follows the next, one night follows the next, in peaceful alternation. Sun, moon, and stars declare their love for you, and likewise you yours for them. The meadow is your girlfriend and you are her boyfriend, you look up at the sky many times in the course of the day and out into the far hazy gentle distance. In the evening, at the appointed hour, the bulls and cows come back to the village, and you just look at them, you lazy bum. Yes, summer vacation is the time for downright colossal lazing, and that's just what's great about it.

1914

SWIFT AND SLUGGISH

I ADMIT that the invention of the story I have to tell here has cost me not a little trouble, although readers may perhaps find it somewhat silly. It is the story of a sluggish swift man and a swift sluggish man. Worthy of note herein is that the swift man, with all his squirrely swiftness, fell far behind the sluggish man's raw sluggishness, which shocked him to no small extent, as one might very well imagine. The curious and remarkable thing about this daft and simple story, which at least is happily not too long and wide in scope, is that the swift man is, fundamentally, the sluggish one and the sluggish man is, fundamentally, the swift one, simply and solely due to the fact that the swift man was alas all too swift and because the

sluggish man with the sum total of his sluggishness fortunately, or unfortunately, stood the test brilliantly, by being not at all swift and yet, fundamentally, much swifter than the swiftest of the swift, while, alas, the swift one, with the whole rich treasure of his swiftness and agility, while not in the slightest sluggish, was nonetheless much more sluggish than the most sluggardly sluggard of all, which is, whatever else it may be, deeply regrettable. The swift one surpassed the sluggish one in downright swiftness, naturally, and yet came up short and was left far behind the sluggish one, who, unless we are badly mistaken, naturally far surpassed the swift one in sluggishness, since he was, indeed, as sluggish as the very personification of sluggishness itself, although he was not nearly as sluggish and was in fact much swifter than the swift one had thought, whom he left in the dust and mightily vanquished, an extraordinary circumstance which made the poor pitiful swift man practically drop dead in horror. This, dearest reader, is the tale of the swift and the sluggish, or, if you prefer, of the sluggish and the swift, as you wish and as it may please you. Judge it kindly, greet it with laughter, and do not get too fiercely enraged at its author, in whose head it was so firmly lodged that he found himself with no choice but to write it down and thereby free himself of it.

1917

FROM MY YOUTH

THAT EARLY time was certainly wonderful. I lived entirely inwardly, almost all in my mind and own head. Nonetheless, or maybe precisely as a result, everything external had a thoroughly joyful ring to it. Incidentally, life was not in the least easy; I had some very hard times to get through, which was of course almost always my own fault.

I often compared myself to young girls, who are eternally full of longing. Sometimes I lay stretched out on my bed like a sick man. I had hundreds of strange urges.

A very learned older gentleman was unusually friendly toward me. He always looked at me with great attention, as though he knew all about the struggles taking place within my nature. No one else saw that in me. I was, from a certain point of view, plucky and bold, and at the same time shy. I went forth into life the way a child goes to school: timidly but not unwillingly.

I had a crude face and slim red hands. Whenever anyone criticized me I felt soft, but yet cold too, and sensitive, but yet coarse too. I possessed a slight tinge of all sorts of different qualities, a fact which now and then gave me a lot to think about. My activities consisted of the systematic exercise of patience and of scribbling on

paper in highly respectable branch offices. Alas, I never did want to wear a formal shirt collar, and when it rained I never did seem to have an umbrella. The hat I wore was always noticeably inappropriate, and yet what I loved was precisely anything that did not look fashionable.

I put women on an unbelievably high pedestal. Along with them, what I loved with all my soul was winter. Suffering seemed sweet to me. There was probably a lot of Christian feeling in me, although I never thought about it.

My education was not going well. I went to this or that meeting, listened to this or that lecture, and spent relatively extremely not a little money on books. The bookseller treated me with a mix of familiarity and respect that charmed me.

Early spring was magnificent. All the houses, trees, and streets gleamed as though they had come from some higher state of being. It was half dream, half fever. I was never sick, just always strangely and seriously infected with a longing for extraordinary things.

I felt it as a kind of blissful pleasure to stand in the cold, high hall of a train station in thin clothes. I felt deeply that the world was dear to me, and that I loved nature and other people with all my heart. I valued life without being afraid of losing it. Autumn was beautiful, with its brownish melancholy that seemed attractive and happily right to me, while in May the blossoming trees and all the singing and wonderful smells plunged me into sadness.

That's how I was back then, more or less. I enjoy thinking back to that time which was so important to me. That was when I started to reflect on what a person needs to do to be a good citizen and stalwart man of the fatherland, and in so doing I honestly and sincerely longed for righteousness. How beautiful it is to long for what is beautiful and good!

It was also around that time that I began to cover thin strips of paper with little poems. I did so with a calm, craftsmanly intent, and yet there was still something mysterious about it. Maybe I started writing poetry because I was poor and needed a hobby to feel richer.

Restlessness, uncertainty, and a premonition of a singular fate may have been what led me, in my sequestered isolation, to pick up my quill and attempt to create a reflection of myself.

I would add that back then I was always full of the most bright and lively gladness. Yes, I had great joys, however quiet and dejected I may have seemed. I say it straight out.

September 1919

ALL RIGHT THEN

A CHARMING, distinguished bourgeois family, who one morning, around 4 a.m., in the enchanting moonlight, while outside the window the bright sunshine was smiling, where unfortunately it was raining cats and dogs, sat contentedly at their tea, at their what? Their tea! and drinking what on this happy occasion? Gadzooks, tea! If the countless dainty little families while sitting at tea like that were drinking anything other than drinking tea then may the devil come and whisk me away, and if those selfsame thoroughly delightful families while slurping their tea were sitting at anything other than sitting at tea then let me no longer be counted among the sensible and intelligent members of the human race, among whom, thank God, I have to this day always continued to be counted.

Hey, writer! Jesus! What's wrong with you? Are you insane?

What's wrong with me? Nothing at all, nothing at all. Please! And I am not in the least insane. I beg a thousand pardons but may I dare maintain that I am completely fine. I am totally normal and reliable in every respect, only just today, as a rare exception, I may perhaps not be in the most writerish mood, the mood I otherwise always make an effort to be in and in tune with. Today I most atypically may be a little hmm hmm and la-di-da. Otherwise I am in perfect health, I can assure you of that. One crucial component of writerliness is humor, and today precisely that, whatever it is that people call humor, seems to be regrettably so to speak somewhat lacking in me.

Odol mouthwash belongs on every modern washstand. Anyone who does not treasure Odol mouthwash does not treasure himself. Without Odol, civilization itself is unthinkable. If you see yourself as, and wish to be taken for, not a barbarian but a cultivated person, you must arrange to get a hold of some Odol as promptly as can be. Odol is the most priceless compound there is and the result of combining the most delicate imaginable substances. Authorities, on the basis of their strictly scientific investigations, hesitate not one moment before ranking Odol as an accomplishment of the very first order and a good deed for humanity. Individual persons or entire tribes or other peoples who refuse Odol must and shall be driven at once to rouse themselves up to the recognition and frequent use of Odol. Odol takes the place of every good human quality in every respect. Ladies of the uppermost middle class and the aristocracy use massive quantities of Odol, because they seem to feel how deeply they need it. High dignitaries have for years or decades doused their highly honored pharynxes with Odol regularly. Odol fills every human gullet or mouth with a long-lasting pleasant fragrance for hours, and the fact cannot be gainsaid that pleasant fragrances are without a doubt, whenever and wherever they may be, preferable to nasty odors and smells. Grocery speculators, elite spies, railroad and oil barons, reigning kings and

queens, admirals and commanders, elected representatives of every party, and many additional highly esteemed persons and personages hurl as much Odol as is in any way possible down their honorable and without question highly respectable throats to their great personal advantage. The nation that has accustomed itself to Odol marches in the vanguard of all nations, with respect to spirit, progress, and nobility of mind and heart, and such a nation, we can surely say with certainty, will fulfill the historically inevitable law of dictating laws to all the other peoples of the globe and ruling with absolute might over the entire world sphere.

Hell's bells, you say, are you completely wee-oo wee-oo?

Ladies and Gentlemen, Darling Children, for God's sake, kindly calm down and don't get worked up, since we know that whoever gets worked up wastes valuable energy since he has to get worked back down again, and that is a shame, since energy is valuable and valuables are expensive and what's expensive must always be scrupulously protected against squandering and misuse. Now does this sentence, clearly perfectly sensible and reasonable in and of itself, sound anything like hoo-hoo? I've already told you, have I not, that today as a rare exception however I do seem to be a little hmm hmm and la-di-da and perhaps a little hoo-hoo and wee-oo wee-oo as well. That surely is completely enough for now, and at the moment I hardly believe it necessary to add anything further.

All European governments evince at all times the absolutely requisite quantity of trust for their corn-pad-using citizens, because whoever uses a pad on his corns thereby makes himself quite rightly beloved everywhere as a harmless subject.

Right! Now once and for all it is really over between us and you. Get out of my house. Understand? Be so kind as to pack up your authorial materials and hand tools at once and leave this instant this room that is intended solely for respectable people.

What room? And why work yourself up and lose valuable energy, when I have after all given you my calm assurance that I am completely fine, that I today as a rare exception however do seem to be a little hmm hmm and la-di-da and perhaps a little hoo-hoo and wee-oo wee-oo as well. Calm down, calm down. Time heals all wounds, you have to hope for the best, and we know that whoever gets worked up only has to get worked back down. So please you're welcome and most humble servant!

I went to the Herrenfeld Brothers theater, where, I must admit, I had a great time. Afterwards I sat, if I am not mistaken, in the Kaffeehaus des Westens café, on the corner of the Ku'damm, and who should I see come in after a while? None other than Wulff, 100 % German, recalling the aurochs, the primeval forests, the clang of

swords, the pelt of bears. His full beard reached down to the tips of his toes. On his arm was a full-bosomed, voluptuous, firm, and juicy capitalist lady. Don't get worked up! I already said loud and clear that today I'm apparently a little hmm hmm and la-di-da and okay a bit hoo-hoo and maybe also a little wee-oo wee-oo. Is that so terrible? All right then! And with that I wish you good day or good night and my best and dearest regards, for I have done my duty and am finished for now and can once again go for a walk.

1917

READING

READING is as productive as it is enjoyable. When I read, I am a harmless, nice and quiet person and I don't do anything stupid. Ardent readers are a breed of people with great inner peace as it were. The reader has his noble, deep, and long-lasting pleasure without being in anyone else's way or bothering anyone. Is that not glorious? I should think so! Anyone who reads is far from hatching evil schemes. An appealing and entertaining thing to read has the good quality of making us forget for a time that we are nasty, quarrelsome people who cannot leave each other in peace. Who could deny this clearly rather sad and melancholy-inducing sentence? No doubt books often also sidetrack us from useful and productive actions; still, all things considered, reading has to be commended as beneficial, since it seems to be utterly necessary to apply a restraint to our violent craving for belongings and a gentle anesthetic to our often ruthless thirst for action. To a certain extent, a book is a fetter: It is not for nothing that one speaks of a captivating or gripping read. A book bewitches and dominates us, it holds us spellbound, in other words it exerts a power over us, and we are happy to let such tyranny occur, for it is a blessing. Anyone captivated and gripped by a book for a given time does not use that time to initiate gossip about his dear fellow man, which is always a great and crude mistake. To talk pointlessly is always a mistake. Anyone who holds a newspaper in his hand and assiduously reads around in it qualifies, practically automatically from that very fact alone, as a good citizen. A newspaper reader is not cursing, swearing, and blustering, and for that reason alone reading newspapers is a true benediction, that should be obvious. A reader always looks proper, decent, decorous, and consummately respectable. I have sometimes heard people talk about so-called harmful reading, e.g., infamous Gothic novels. That's another story we shall avoid getting into, but we can say this much: The worst book in the world is not as bad as the complete indifference of never picking up a book at all. A trashy book is not nearly as dangerous as people sometimes

think, and the so-called really good books are under certain conditions by no means as free of danger as people generally like to believe. Intellectual things are never as harmless as eating chocolate or enjoying an apple tart or the like. In principle, the reader just has to know how to cleanly separate reading from life. I remember that as a schoolboy I used to carefully creep under or behind a pear tree every once in a while with an absolutely phenomenally great and fat trashy Gothic novel that took place in Hungary, needless to say, so that my father wouldn't catch me at my eager reading and greedy enjoyment, which would have resulted in a humiliating tribunal of justice. The book had the mysterious title: *Sandor*. To follow up on what I have just said about reading and life, perhaps I may be permitted to tell a short story as well, namely:

THE WOMAN WHO READ GOTTFRIED KELLER

A pretty young woman assiduously read the works of Gottfried Keller. Who does not admire these works? Anything I say here can budge the great writer's reputation as little as it could a boulder. When this pretty young good woman had finished her beautiful book, which conveyed to her such a comfortably noble picture of the world and its inhabitants, she felt in a strange way depressed about life. Her own modest life path suddenly seemed to her very bare. She had become, through her reading, demanding. What she saw in Gottfried Keller's books she would very much have liked to see in daily life as well, but life was and always is different from books. Living and reading are two very different things. The Gottfried Keller reader felt like hanging her little head in a disappointed sulk. She was almost angry at and resentful of human life, because it was not like the life in Keller's works. Luckily, she soon thereafter realized that there was little or no point in bearing a grudge against everyday life, which was admittedly perhaps somewhat beastly from a certain point of view. "Be humble, don't make special demands, and for God's sake take existence as it is and comes and is given to you," an inner voice said to the ardent reader of the works of Gottfried Keller, and as soon as she had realized clearly and unambiguously how necessary it was to be modest and undemanding from the bottom of your heart in this, as mentioned, arguably now and then rather cold and beastly world, she straightaway made a happy, cheerful face again, had to laugh at herself and her Gottfried Keller obsession, and was content.

1917

A DEVIL OF A STORY

NOW, DEAR reader, let me tell you the story of a love that was of much too high and delicate a type to be able to have any sort of tangible, proper consequences. I should, of course, write a long and finely structured novel on such a moving and beautiful theme, but it's so nice and sunny and hot outside at the moment that an ordinary person like me would rather take a walk, or perhaps nurse a glass of beer with visible pleasure in a shady garden under the plane trees, or maybe go swimming in the nearby lake under a refreshing west wind. So I will make it brief and say that once, a short while ago, there was a woman (oh, if only she had been Swedish, Russian, Danish!) who loved a young man, and in fact loved him so passionately that she wanted to run away with him out into the wide world, but the messed-up thing was that she was married, and the even more messed-up part of the story was that she was unable to do her husband wrong. Here, oh esteemed reader of Swedish and Nordic novels, I arrive at and in fact wade knee-deep into what is generally called the Danish or psychological novel. And so I continue, with trembling quill, no, hand (but thence quill!) and relate what a real writer cannot say without a sob, namely that the woman almost went out of her healthy and right mind. The good husband likewise, practically. Both of them were, that is to say, too tactful, refined, and sensitive ever to be able to bring their respective selves to cause each other sorrow. Behold the intricate and involved story I have so rashly embroiled myself in! The woman would have been all too happy to be up and off with her stormy lover, but she was too noble to run off, and, yes, she loved, oh dear Lord, them both: her husband as well as the young man. A frightful situation. Now, now I say! by the honor I enjoy as an agile pusher of and painter with the pen, we are seriously daning and sweding now, in a way that I am unwaveringly convinced no one far and wide can match. Can I depart with my lover in search of wide open spaces if at the same time I want with all my heart to stay right here at home with my dear and good husband? Can I love my lover lovingly enough if I am unable to stop loving this legally wedded and espoused husband? Here, it seems to me, the situation is crawling with true if not indeed true blue spiritual and novelistic problems. But onward! The good husband wanted with all his soul to permit his wife to rush off, so that she might become intoxicated with monstrously unprecedented amorous joy, but then he did not give her his permission after all, since doing so would have torn his very heart asunder. From love he was happy to allow it, but then it was from love and nothing but that he begged and pleaded with her to stay nice and well-behaved at home, so that he would not go out of his poor, healthy mind, which nonetheless he would be only too glad to lose and lack forever out of love for her. The wife cried, first of all because

she could not go out into the world with her lover, and secondly because she no longer found the strength to stay calmly at home with her husband and dutifully attend to the housework, as previously. The husband cried, tears poured down his face, and he was acting like a desperate man, first of all because he was simply compelled to say to his wife that she should please just stay home and calm down, which caused him pain, since after all as a loving husband he wanted to give his wife everything she wanted, and secondly because he wanted to allow his wife everything possible and everything thinkable, but just couldn't. The wife wanted to, but was unable to, and similarly the husband wanted to, but couldn't. And so they both cried. Even the young man had to partake of these tears, like it or not. All three of them wretchedly sobbed. It was just that all three were too sensitive, and so nothing came of it, and with that this story is over too.

January 1916

THE SOLDIER

THE SOLDIER is calm, steadfast, brave, and humble. Grumbling and bickering are not allowed. He must obey. If he obeys happily it is that much easier to obey, every soldier feels that. Soldiers who refuse to obey are not soldiers at all, and obedience intending to remain within certain limits is not the kind that every soldier owes his fatherland. He owes his fatherland obedience to the utmost. When I say soldier here, I also mean the officers, who are as much soldiers as the ordinary soldiers are. The officers, too, must obey, even the Commander in Chief must obey. Commands are only a form of communication and the cutting tone used to give orders is just a custom. When the simple soldier obeys his superior, he can tell himself that this superior is himself just a means to an end. In military service, everyone must serve. If the soldier is a servant, so too is the general a servant. He too has nothing higher and better in view than to render service. In the service, serving is the highest calling. Everything else, like for instance promotion, is just a tinkling of secondary importance. The most important thing is that everyone stands his ground, holds his position, and carries out his duties there. That is sometimes hard, but it is also quite simple. Service is not fun but then again there is no reason why it should be. If it was fun, then young girls would be best at it. Since, however, it isn't, men are better suited for it. A brave man is probably best suited, in fact, for serious and difficult tasks. The soldier is serious and energy and goodwill are reflected in his face. This energy does not preclude merriment, and seriousness does not necessarily imply gloominess. The soldier is meant to defend the fatherland, and if fate decides that he should

come under fire, he will act bravely because it is his duty to act bravely. Danger is less frightening when you face it bravely; it takes on monstrous proportions only when seen through the eyes of cowards and pitiful weaklings. The fact that one who neglects his duty is in precisely the same danger as one who does his duty makes it less difficult to carry out one's duty and makes dereliction of duty less tempting. What true soldier would be capable, in the hour of universal need, in the wonderful hour of bitter earnestness, in the hour of danger, in the hour of desperate necessity, of being disloyal and forgetting what he owes to his fatherland? No friend of the fatherland can even imagine such a soldier. "There are no soldiers like that," he says to himself. Every soldier says to himself: "There are no soldiers like that." For every soldier is a friend of the fatherland.

December 1914

SOMETHING ABOUT SOLDIERS

A MAN GETS used to the soldier's life without at the same time ever quite being able to tell how. We can say, in general, that the service is bearable. Each day passes after the other. The tasks that a soldier has to perform can and indeed must be described as to a certain extent rather monotonous, but it probably has to be that way, since I don't feel that we would be right to think that a man goes into the service merely with the goal of finding exciting and diverting entertainment every day. The life of a soldier has certain definite, constantly repeated hard things about it, and yet mastering those things requires in my opinion only a reasonable, not particularly great amount of patience. In addition, there is also no doubt great charm in the service as well, like for instance the constant cleaning. You are always cleaning and yet always find yourself in a situation in which additional cleaning is urgently needed. Herein lies, in my experience, the great and good manner of passing the time in the service, which, I would say, intrinsically possesses a kind of quickly accomplished, rough, and large-scale cleanliness. The soldier does not intend to, and cannot, detour into the tiny and tiniest details of cleanliness. That would be in no way soldierly. Have for example I even once during my service, or more than two or three times, used soap? Not that I know of. I washed my hands with dirt, it was simpler that way. When I got back home I would look at myself again in the mirror. The rather grimy appearance and degenerate look that had overtaken my face puzzled me a little. Still, I was honestly happy about it.

I spoke earlier of the monotony of the service: this is probably inherent in military thinking as such. Only countless repetitions of one and the same exercise produce a high degree of competence, and

competence is also beauty, and beauty is the suppleness that reminds one of the curious machinery and technology of a dream. In this consists the whole art of being a soldier, and it moves in high style from holding the weapon to combat.

The soldier is lodged now in a schoolroom, now in a high, wide dance hall decorated with old or new murals, now in a horrible barn or granary, now in a hovel or barracks dug into a cliff, now in the corridor of a monastery or a cozy farmer's cottage. Lying and slumbering on rough straw can be just as refreshing and just as delightful as stretching out for a rest on the fanciest, most expensive bed. It depends on what you're used to; habit is the reigning queen of our lives. The person who happens to be an artist gets used to everything in life by virtue of a wonderful ability that is granted to him! The air in the quarters where around fifty or more people are lying right up next to each other is, as you might imagine, somewhat bad, and yet I do not believe that it is such a great misfortune to have to breathe in air that is rather thick and heavy with entirely natural exhalations and emanations every now and again. A healthy individual can disregard such and other similar matters with remarkable ease, all the more so since he can after all spend the whole day literally swimming and bathing in fresh air. A soldier is more likely to be found on the wide-open mountaintops or in a green forest or in the middle of a blossoming meadow than anywhere else. Rain and sunshine, wind and storms, harden his body in every way one might wish. Does not every soldier have, to mention just one thing that possesses great value and charm, a bread sack, from which, in the field, at an opportune moment, he can draw forth a piece of meat or a sausage or whatever else good and nourishing he has taken the precaution of packing into it and valiantly eat it, thereby rejuvenating his somewhat depleted life force? To march in formation and in time down spic-and-span streets, through a beautiful, rich country, is that not magnificent? If you are quartered in a pretty village and a fellow comes strolling across the street, the army post officer who follows you everywhere like a well-trained valet eager to serve will call out his name and he can pick up his letter or package just like that.

The food a soldier receives is not exactly princely fare, of course, but he himself must admit that such a thing would be rather inappropriate and, incidentally, he would not be at all well served by it anyway. Simple food and a cheerful, unworried existence are better than fancy dishes bound up, perhaps, with sorrow and irritation. The soldier often curses and swears. But that doesn't mean much. Swearing with honest dislike is better than a constant string of peevish grumbling objections. Someone who thunders and rages feels better afterwards.

July 1915

IN THE MILITARY

THERE are some things in the military that are without question extremely nice and pleasant, like for instance marching to music through peaceful, friendly villages where schoolgroups, groups of women, and blossoming trees stand along the side of the road. What does a soldier have to think about all day? The fact is, for the thing we call militarism to work properly, he should really think absolutely nothing or deliberately as little as possible. He is only too happy to avail himself of a custom that frees him from discomfort and complaints, since thinking, as everyone knows, does cause headaches. How attractive, delightful, and magical it sometimes seems to me not to think. That's the thing. The moments in the military when the proper command is "At ease!" are enchanting. The way the whole group or company dissolves its form in painterly, laid-back fashion and every man is free to wander off and away however he pleases, without any further consideration of obligation or drill, is most amusing and significantly fun. At once, the majority of these fellows or (to speak more politely of these defenders of the fatherland!) individuals stick a happy, jolly, jaunty cheroot or nice white slender cigarette into their mouths, light up whatever awaits lighting up, and smoke. The truth is, mountains and mints of money are smoked up in the military. To return to people's thoughts, you have to picture and imagine a million-strong crowd of fellows or (to be more polite) individuals who dispense with the thinking of any halfway or entirely reasonable thoughts. Is this not a picture to instill horror? Absolutely, almost! Unfortunately, I myself am one of those fellows who find it nice not to think. Also, I hold the principle of service in immensely high esteem, and thus I would prefer, in God the Merciful's name, to keep silent on this embarrassing and inalterable circumstance or theme or I don't know what all to call it. Soldiers in this category know how to write, gab, prattle, and nevertheless keep nice and properly quiet. But in all seriousness: There are beauties and freedoms in the military that cannot be bought at any price, and therefore I would not wish not to be a part of it. Where else but in the military and as a simple, ready-and-rough soldier could one ever dare and take the liberty to devour an apple or, say, plum tart around eight at night, in lovely evening light, on a public small-town street, with unbounded delight and complete peace of mind? Soldiers are a kind of children, and are actually a lot like children, too, sometimes treated and guided strictly, sometimes gently.

Yes, goodness gracious, I am certainly a proponent of the

slackard's life, laziness, happiness, and peace; but alas I am also for the military. I think peace is nice and I think the military is nice. How can I make heads or tails of this strange contradiction? I cannot deny the peace-loving part of myself, but nor can I deny that I am a true friend of the soldier's life. Anyway, I notice that this essay is about ready to draw to a close, and so I take my leave with all best regards until the next time I have the opportunity to take pen in hand.

September 1915

THE GERMAN LANGUAGE

ONCE IT was great and powerful, with lordly gaze and posture, but then came a time when it forgot itself and permitted itself to be misused, and it turned ugly. Those who spoke it made it into a means of expression for everything banal, so that the whole world laughed at its low and sorry state. The whole beautiful thing collapsed. What had once been exemplary became a caricature. The splendid tree withered away, and still it fancied itself, as bad as it had become. Its disgrace lasted for a long time. Some people thought it was near death, and they were right. It died, that is to say, it crept around like a dead thing. No one thought it would ever regain its strength. It lost all its charm and attraction, sounded dry, hard, and clownish, and served the purposes almost solely of rude aggression and rough haste. Its ruined voice was the most unpleasant thing imaginable; most people found it horrific. Yes, it was sick, and it now lies downtrodden and crushed, and yet there are still those who love it as they always have, and who want to remain true to it, for they think that it is imperishable and that it will one day regain its beauty. In total silence, in dark and inconspicuous places, they nurse it back to health. Surely it will rise up once more and perfume the air and blossom and have its spring and ring out like birdsong. One won't want to miss that. Those who believe in it have to be patient. Now it is tired, sleepy, with weary limbs and soundless words. It seems paralyzed, but it will leap again and dance and have all the agility it once possessed. Just wait until it has been restored. It is lost, it is crying, but it will find its way and laugh out loud. Then it will be like a summer garden, like a resurrected sun, and everything around it will be happy and rich and strong and good. And soft and natural. Then it will know itself once more, and all will delight in it. It will blast like a beatific wind across the earth and all things. Downcast now, it will rejoice. Desire and comfort will be felt by all who hear it speak. Maybe, when that day comes, I will lie beneath a fir tree on the grass and kiss it and once again be its poet.

May 1919

MORNING AND NIGHT

EARLY in the morning, how good, how blindingly bright your mood was, how you peeked into life like a child and, no doubt, often enough acted downright fresh and improper. Enchanting, beautiful morning with golden light and pastel colors!

How different, though, at night — then tiring thoughts came to you, and solemnity looked at you in a way you had never imagined, and people walked beneath dark branches, and the moon moved behind clouds, and everything looked like a test of whether you too were firm of will and strong.

In such a way does good cheer constantly alternate with difficulty and trouble. Morning and night were like wanting to and needing to. One drove you out into vast immensity, the other pulled you back into modest smallness again.

May 1920

FLOWERS

HOW QUIET you are, you dear, delicate flowers. You don't move from place to place, you have neither eyes nor ears, and you never take a walk, which is so nice. Now and then you look like you can talk, but in any case you certainly have feelings and a sensitivity of your own. I often feel like you are pondering, with all kinds of thoughts. I'm doubtless deluding myself. But still, I think about you a lot and I would love to live with you, as one of you, I would happily be like you, let the sunshine caress me, rock and sway in the wind.

May 1920

THE LITTLE TREE

I SEE IT even when I am not paying attention and walk right by it. It doesn't run away, it doesn't move at all, can't think, doesn't want a thing, no, only to grow, to exist in space and have leaves that one doesn't touch, only looks at. Hurrying past in the shadows they cast are all sorts of busy people.

Have I really never given you anything? But it doesn't need any happiness. Maybe it is pleased when someone finds it beautiful. Do you think so, dear readers? What holy innocences it proclaims. It knows nothing, it is there entirely and only for my pleasure.

Why does it have no way to perceive my love? We say something and mean well but no sense of hearing is granted it. Never does it see me smile at its greeting that it is not aware of itself. Or lie down at the feet of its being, like that woman departing forever painted by

Courbet, to die!

And yet I will live on, but then what will become of you?

October 1925

THE LAST PROSE PIECE

THIS IS probably my last prose piece. There are all sorts of considerations that lead me to conclude that it is high time for a goatherd boy like myself to be done with the composing and submitting of prose pieces and abandon this clearly too difficult occupation. I am happy to look around for another line of work that might make it possible for me to eat my bread in peace.

What have I been doing these ten long years? In order to be able to answer that question I must first sigh, second sob, and third start a new chapter or at least a fresh paragraph.

For ten long years I have continually written little prose pieces, which rarely proved worth the trouble. What have I not had to endure! A hundred times over, I cried, “Never again shall I write and send out!” only to write and send out new productions every time on the same or at most the following day, to the extent that today I can hardly believe this course of action myself.

The extent of my submissions will probably never be matched. It stands alone. Due to its drollness it really belongs affixed to an advertising pillar so that all can marvel at my guileless fidelity. Nothing of its like will ever happen again. With respect to the production and releasing out into the world of appropriate prose pieces I manifested an unspeakable avidity and indescribable perseverance. It flew out from my watchmaking studio or dressmaker’s/shoemaker’s shop in every direction like doves from a dovecote or bees from a beehive. Flies and mosquitoes buzz hither and thither no more busily than did the prose pieces I sent winging their way to all sorts of editors and publishers.

What did messieurs the librarians do with all the sketches, studies, and essays I heaped upon their heads? They read them, nosed them, eyeballed them, took them under consideration, and then put them neatly back into their folders or drawers where they remained safe and sound awaiting their respective appropriate opportunities.

And did said opportunity hasten to show its face? It most certainly did not! It never seemed to be in much of a hurry to turn up. Sometimes it took years before it arrived, during which span of time an unfortunate man in his attic room tore out his hair.

What I joyfully wrote and shooed forth was thrown into as it were solitary confinement, where it slowly shriveled up. Lines, sentences, pages died heartrending deaths in the air of the drawer, death by

drying up and withering. I saw what I had so briskly brought forth turn dull, pale, and wan.

One time, a fresh young verdant rosy-cheeked pretty round prose piece spent six whole years sitting in a barren, desolate place, where eventually it became completely scraggly and dried up. When at last it came to light, i.e., appeared in print, I had to cry for joy, behaving like a poor father overcome with tender feelings.

What doesn't a person experience who gets it into his head to write prose pieces and send them off to all kinds of editors in the hope that these pieces might correspond to their wishes and fit their needs? If anyone intending to throw himself into or upon the writing of prose pieces should ask my advice, I would advise against, by telling him that I consider his intention unfortunate.

The day-, night-, comic, tragic, melodramatic, show, farcical, doorical, decorative, and artistic pieces I constantly, hopefully sent out proved to be unusable most of the time, rarely if ever fit the needs, and generally utterly failed to correspond to the wishes.

Did I let these betrayed hopes deter me? Not a chance! Again and again I found the courage to produce and hand in, complete and send out. For ten years I indefatigably stuffed people's mailboxes, pockets, and warehouses full of material and provisions, which made the Herr Bosses laugh themselves silly.

I filled other people's gaps with prose pieces. My mind goes numb to think of it. Ministers shook with laughter when they saw my cartloads arrive. I took up whole freight trains with my missives. And whatever I let fly was graciously received.

Where other people had bright heads and were clever right down to their fingertips, I was dumb all the way to the top and another three feet up too. While I went around naked, luxury and prosperity reigned among other doubtless nice people. Whenever I emptied out my own drawer, I felt strange. But in creating a yawning emptiness for myself, I was eagerly ensuring abundance for otherwise nice and charming other people. Oh how the gods and demigods made fun of this humble submitter's simplemindedness! Many a time they were afraid they would burst with laughter. On the one hand, exuberance; on the other hand, tears. On one side, giants; on the other side, dwarfs. Here masters; there slaves.

Whenever I humbly inquired whether my little children were being well taken care of and were nice and healthy, or even if they were still alive, I would receive the shattering comeback: "None of your business." So, his own children were no longer any of their father's business, and the things and thingumajigees produced from the sweat of my own brow were now things about which I did not have the least right to speak.

One time, I was told: “We lost your prose pieces in the chaos and hubbub. Please don’t hold it against us and please send us something new. We would like to lose that too, whereupon you can send in something new yet again. Work hard. Bite back any superfluous ill temper. We do feel bad for you.”

What good would it have done me to cry “Never again shall I write and send in!”? Did it not give additional luster to my reputation as the most gentle-spirited of men for me to squander a few more new and beautiful prose pieces that same day or the one following? As God is my witness, a donkey is piled high with burdens, and as long as there are sheep in this world the wolves will have a field day, but I would rather be humble and keep quiet, and busily, dutifully write more nice little prose pieces. Should anyone intending to fling himself into the sending out of prose pieces ask my advice, I would advise against, by telling him that I find his intention comic.

“Take that! I want to take revenge on you so that you will learn to tremble and beg for forgiveness,” one of the dervishes who dispose over prosperity and indisposition wrote me one day, as though life were a card game.

Once something has finally been made perfect, with trouble and care, and a poor, scrawny, fragile little prose piece begging for mercy appears in print, the author faces new problems, namely the never sufficiently esteemed public. I would rather deal with I don’t know what than with people who take an interest in the products of my pen. Someone said to me, “Aren’t you ashamed to go before the public with such scribbling?” That’s the thanks you get if you try to earn your bread by supplying your fellow man with prose pieces.

I intend to adapt to everything happily, as long as I no longer have to rely on false hopes. Finally I am free, and I rejoice, and if I don’t rejoice then at least I laugh, and if I don’t laugh then at least I take a deep breath, and if I don’t take a deep breath then at least I rub my hands together, and if someone with certain intentions were to ask me for advice, I would advise him against, by telling him what I would tell anyone who sought such information from me in that connection.

It goes without saying that at the first hint of spring I used to write a merry spring piece, in the fall season a brownish autumn piece, and for Christmas a Christmas or snowstorm piece. In future I intend to forego such things and never again do what I have done for ten long years. At last I have drawn a firm line under the truly astoundingly great column of figures and am done with pursuing that for which I am not sufficiently intelligent.

Had I the audacity to send in refractory and unvarnished truths, I would surely have been enlightened with the following words: “Don’t

you know that there is mighty little freedom anywhere you look? That everyone conforms damned well to everyone else? Put that in your pipe and smoke it or write it and be glad if you can get away with it."

Things don't look good for me. No doubt about that. Earlier it was easy, I used to put an ad in the paper: "Young man seeks occupation." Today I have to say: "Man alas no longer young but rather already somewhat elderly and worn-down begs for mercy and a refuge." Times have changed, and the little years flit by like snow in April. I am a poor man, no longer young, with just the ability necessary to turn out prose pieces, like this for example:

"Trot, trot, trot. What's wrong with me? Am I stupid? What will become of me? An office boy, or what? I am strongly considering the necessity of some such thing. One, two, three and four, five and six. Between sleeping and waking I heard a voice saying that as though it would continue for all eternity. Oh, a cry escaped me then, and more than ever before I was aware of the sum total of my smallness. No, a person is not large, he is weak and helpless. Well that's that."

I sent "Trot, Trot, Trot" to twenty-one to thirty-eight editors in the hope that it might fit a need, but twenty-one to thirty-eight times this hope turned out to be false, and this little Gothic piece failed to meet with a favorable reception anywhere.

Thirty to forty superiors refused to take this unquestionably superlative piece. Instead they rejected it as firmly as could be and sent it straight back to me.

One of these dictators wrote to me: "Mon dieu, what are you thinking?" Another opined: "Ach, why don't you pass along your fairy-tale piece to *The Venetian Night*, I'm sure they'll be tremendously happy to get it. As for us, we would ask to be spared any further trot, trot, trotting and five-to-sixeries."

I sent "Trot, Trot, Trot" to the abovementioned newspaper, which thanked me politely by saying: "Ach, we would much rather you had understood that this charming piece was not quite right for us."

"If at first you don't succeed," I thought, and I sent the piece to Cuba. They don't seem interested in it at all. I think the best thing for everyone would be for me to sit in the corner and keep quiet.

October 1919

PART III

HANS

WHEN HANS, somewhat later, after much in his life had changed and he found himself occupied with entirely different things, thought back every now and then to that time, which he had primarily spent sauntering, strolling, and ambling around, the first thing he liked to remember, with a deep inner pleasure, was how one evening, after dinner, when it was just beginning to darken, he went out to the nearby lake where he sat down on a bench provided for such restful sojourns under the finely forking, delicate branches of a willow tree, so that, while in conformity to the gloomy weather it was raining out of the gray summer evening sky into the lake as though crying as if out of tear-filled eyes, he could sit for an hour there and dream.

As previously mentioned, he later used to recall with great clarity, once all sorts of external circumstances had long since forced entirely different impressions upon him, that beautiful evening hour he experienced back then by the lake, where he could abandon himself to his thoughts unmolested, which gave him keen pleasure; where the waves beat against the warm, friendly shore with delightful, painstaking splashes while familiar, heart-captivating figures rose up out of the soft, dark water into the air, with meaningful, noble gestures, such as, for example, the form of his old father, and the face of his dear mother.

A magnificent gentleness and nostalgic beauty lay over the landscape. The high mountain, drawn down by gentle forces, sank mildly with a wonderful gesture into the depths, where the smooth surface of the water gracefully reflected it. The large lake resembled a child who is completely silent because asleep and dreaming. The calm reigning everywhere all around was made yet stronger, and bigger, by the delicate rush of the rain; the silence, rustling noiselessly back and forth like an evening bird, experienced no lessening from the timorous light wind shyly wafting from the west. On the evening and, later, the nighttime water, several boats or barques, as if set in motion by harmonious feelings of home and carried onward by beautiful premonitions, floated past the figure sitting on his bench in a silence that might perhaps have been only slightly disturbed now and then by a late promenader's footsteps.

As far as he can now recall, it was on the following day that he stood on the high cliffs right next to the lake, from which he looked down, with eyes as amazed as they were contented, into the brightly

glittering gentle valleys sparkling with sunny objects and patterns. Everything on land, on water shimmered, shone. The lake was like a happy smile. The nearby forest was still wet with raindrops. Hans pondered where he wanted to walk, then slid into the forest, slipping between the wet branches. He found the green, moist, warm shrubs and underbrush magnificent. Passing by splendid oak trees, he walked back uphill. Down below, the tidy little city lay spread out before him like a toy, presenting a marvelous view. These bright, warm colors were like a many-voiced song. Green and blue and white were the prominent tonic notes, reigning everywhere. That afternoon, he showed up so punctually for lunch that he was astounded himself. In those days, he knew how to manage his walks so that he never missed a mealtime.

He was almost never at home. Rainwater was utterly incapable of preventing him from going out. Every kind of weather was equally lovable and precious. Since the suit and hat he wore were not of the newest or most exquisite, he did not need to take any special care of them. As far as he was concerned, it could rain down upon his hat, shoes, clothes, nose, collar, forehead, hair, and hands as hard and as often as it felt inclined to.

Sometimes, as an exception, he sat in his room and read or wrote something or another. The world was too beautiful for him to spend too much time slumped at home or, to put it perhaps with a slightly more appropriate delicacy, preferring to remain seated and pursue his studies.

He lived in a kind of palace, French-style, that is to say on the sixth floor right up under the roof. His favorite book was Gotthelf's *Erdbeerimareili*, a story that he sometimes used to read half out loud to himself, to which end his attic room seemed to serve perfectly as a recital hall. The recitator and the listening public were both, of course, him.

The room's window offered a truly very lively, entertaining, and exciting view of a bright and often crowded square, which bore some kind of stamp of Andalusia, i.e., Spain. Hans felt that it reminded him of Toledo, namely the square he was in love with and officially engaged to, which presumably was rather superfluous. Now he who felt that this or that reminded him of Granada, Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, or Toledo had incidentally never actually been to such cities, from which one may conclude either that he liked to brag or liked to lie, or liked to fib, or liked to fantasize, poetize, and dream. It is all too easy for those who have an imagination and use it too to seem like scoundrels and cheats. Just by the by.

Let an old tobacco pipe be mentioned here, but hopefully only in passing.

Hans, who owned a total of five books, had to laugh heartily and often at such imposing institutions as the City Library, the Monastery Repository, or the State Chancellery. Rather often and regularly he drank tea, because such a drink or sip had, he fancied, an imagination-awakening effect, which was thoroughly stimulating.

One day, he experienced an unforgettable, magnificent storm, by which he meant in particular a dusky street alongside the railroad tracks down which whizzed a raging tempest whirling up dust with astounding tempestuousness. All kinds of men, women, and children fled hastily from it as though from an unchained monster fast approaching. The flight, the dust, thick smoke, wet wind taken all together made a great impression and painted a frightening and at the same time exciting picture. Then thunder boomed, heavy rain pelted down on the roofs, streets, and hurrying people; lightning bolts tore through the sky; all at once the whole region was strangely dark. Later, though, the world looked friendlier and more cheerful than it had before the storm. With fresher breaths, people stepped back to their doors and out into the purified air where everything sparkled moistly and beckoned confidingly, streets, buildings, and trees adorably shimmering their hellos.

Often he spent the whole day walking in the mountains, with a piece of cheese, chocolate, bacon, or sausage or an egg in his pocket, fighting off thirst, exhaustion, and hunger, which made him happy, since he was a great enthusiast for enduring the kind of strenuous bodily activity that filled his heart with ardent fire and soul with joyful pride.

Lonely forests high in the mountains, trees here and there blown down by storms, delighted him. A spring, a well, or sometimes a glass of milk sufficed to liberate the weary wanderer from all sorts of fatigue. He won back his lost strength more rapidly than he would have thought he would, and quickly felt restored. Later, descending back to the lowlands, the people there, their residences, the fruit orchards and vegetable gardens, and all the other dear and gentle and eminently rational things — clambering more mildly down the steep cliffs back to culture, population, streets, and generally accepted circumstantialities of all kinds — was a new joy for him, which would then typically find its flowering flashing pinnacle in a half or sometimes even whole carafe of wine, by which I mean to say that the thirsty wanderer with love-filled spirit and suntanned face would stop in at an inn arbor or twilit gazebo where he would be practically beside himself with sheer enjoyment.

“For someone who walks a lot, good sturdy well-nailed shoes are conceivably important,” he said to himself, and thereupon bought some snappy walking and hiking boots which seemed to possess no

less sound a construction than magnificent a fit, and in so doing he told himself that it was a pleasure to be able to support local industries to this by no means insignificant extent.

A general store provided cheroots while a charming sunny stationery store offered the finest and most delicate writing- and letter-paper. What all couldn't a person make off and scurry home with in exchange for cash money?

Hans preferred to have himself shaved and barbered and his hair cut in a neighboring town, medieval in appearance and extremely homey in feel. While undergoing meticulous treatment from his admirably adroit coiffure-artist, he had as extensive and involved a conversation as he wanted with him about all imaginable hair and mustache eventualities, to the point where everyone in the whole friendly shaving room listened in eagerly and wondered in honest and sincere amazement.

On expeditions and other investigative operations he always carried himself in more or less such a fashion that people, all indeed his dear fellow citizens, might take him for perhaps a notary, schoolteacher, junior curate, technical director, judiciary official, earnest tax collector, businessman, or architect. From which may plainly be seen that he always made an effort to come across as an individual and man of thoroughly resolute hue and career path, not like a fellow with neither character nor resolution.

"Purposefully and goal-directedly should I and want I to move through the city, even when I am not by chance pursuing any goal whatsoever nor having the least shred of reasonable purpose in mind."

Some people took him for a random passing elegant foreigner, a richly furnished singular traveler. In general, however, he appeared to be an important, rushed, expert, busily mercantile sort of businessman, trotting rigidly along, about whom you could see that he had not the remotest idea of the possible existence of any time to waste.

Schoolchildren would give him numerous polite greetings because they thought he was from the school committee. Did he not look almost like a supervisor, trustee, or member of the board of examiners? Could such a serious face possibly coexist with anything other than grades and semester report cards? Certainly not!

As for his hat, its uniquely solemn stiffness and rare age alike surely suited it splendidly to speedy protective custody in a museum. Hans nonetheless held to the firm opinion that how probably formerly remarkably handsome his hat must no doubt have once been was apparent to all. Faded beauty, he told himself, was known to be able to make women intriguing, so why not hats for a change.

Inordinately happy as Hans was to let things go with such

thoroughly pleasant considerations, he thought that he would have to take great care to get a hold of some sturdy nice new item at the appropriate opportunity, no doubt next year. Since money was rather scarce with him, he could make such promises to himself with the most placid conscience and face.

Insofar as he could recall to his fortunately rather good memory later, he saw at that time, that is to say, on one of the days that for various good reasons were significant to him since they represented to a certain extent a particular type of transition, namely the transformation from something old or tired and worn-out into something fully rejuvenated, youthful, new, or unused and unabraded, in an open field, an enraged, infuriated man, who, like a tragedian acting onstage and playing his role with whatever greater or lesser success, was talking out loud into thin air, gesticulating all the while in horrible fashion.

For the rest of his life, Hans never forgot this wild, angry man. On the contrary, he always thought zealously and insistently about this no less lamentable, sad, and regrettable than comic and ridiculous figure.

The weather itself was in harmony, so to speak, with this man in the open field, acting almost exactly as raw and stormily as the man, who spoke or conducted a language with extra-loud words and screamed it out into the surrounding space, the way only a furiously defiant rebel against God and everything under the sun would call them forth in his mouth, by piling up the ferociously shattered tower of his outrage into the heavens like a gigantic tower, spreading terrible effects and slinging ghastly circumstances all about.

Clearly the man was in an unbridled state of excitement. From his disgusting, horrible gestures that seemed to look like licking, devouring tongues of flame spoke and blazed contempt, rage, hate, and fury.

Probably, though, he was very simply nothing but seriously mentally ill, for, on the whole, solitary individuals walk their path quietly and do not talk like that into empty space or with trees and winds who can have neither hearing nor understanding for the reckless performance of excited people.

Nowhere in sight in the surrounding area was there anyone to whom the raging man could have been directing his furious declamation. In the closest proximity was only Hans, whom, however, the wild man with his back to him did not even see.

Accordingly, this rebel was speaking, in a pathological vituperation of everything around him that by absolutely no means brought him anything like relief, solely and exclusively with ghosts, nonexistent creatures of the imagination who were dry and withered through and through, or at best with a phantom or his own diseased

fantasies which seemed to be at once tempting him and mocking him to the same immense extent.

He fought against perfect nothingness, lashed out with ridiculous vehemence at absolutely invisible enemies all around him, defended himself in a life-and-death struggle against a completely imaginary overwhelming attack, and spoke to the figures and voices that either no one but he or perhaps not even he himself could see and hear.

All of his tempestuous movements were utterly wasted, everything he said resounded unheard, and his dissolute behavior and actions were senseless insofar as there was no one to take notice of them and thus they had not the slightest effect on anything. This memory of someone naturally giving rise to disgust more than to pity nonetheless stayed with Hans as a stern example and warning, although shortly thereafter he was to be the spectator of a truly wonderful performance.

At the proper time, that is, on the occasion of a nice charming run of business or run in the park that had proceeded very pleasantly and divertingly, he met two people, two little people, who stood, vis-à-vis the just previously discussed strange fellow and vicious chap who found himself in the murkiest possible conflict and quarrel with any and every social, civil, or human institutions, plans, regulations, and existences, in the most charming and pleasant contrast, namely two friendly beggars sitting peacefully next and close to each other on the ground at the edge of a forest, who seemed to him to be anything but hateful and misanthropic.

Where the gloomy other man acted wild, insane, and dissolute, behaved in the most unseemly way imaginable, and thus gave rise to immediate dislike, these quiet folks here in a corner of the woods conducted themselves as gently and good-humoredly as they could, hence of course disseminating sympathy in such a way that Hans stopped next to them with a kind of delight.

The sight that the beggar man and woman offered our passerby was moving, in fact clearly stirring, since it showed how two entirely impoverished people in isolation stuck together, faithful, honest, and solicitous, by sitting next to each other thoroughly unmiserable in their sorrow, instead innocent, affectionate, and warmhearted in their need, awaiting whatever came with a deep inner calm and in fact, it seemed, good cheer almost.

Hans, moved for a moment by the winning picture, said in silence to himself the following words:

“How warmly and intimately human suffering is painted here, presented as entirely harmless, natural, and appealing before the eyes of one who has happened by chance to wander past and see this charming if at the same time melancholy scene. Must not anyone with

a heart capable of feeling sensations almost smile at such a picture and at the same time shed a tear?”

It seemed to him as though heaven were wanting to shine an especially beautiful and radiant beam of light down upon this poverty that does not rail and rage but rather accepts in God’s name whatever fate and its dispensations command it to bear and endure.

Everything faltered and came to a stop like pitch-black, moonless, starless midnight around the insurrectionist there in the open field; here, by the happy beggar couple, it resounded as though with love songs and melodies of peace, it flapped and fluttered as though with the wings of an angel, it was light like the realms where all good people imagine the saints live.

Perhaps the rebel in the empty field had suffered an injustice, but what will come of anyone who can no longer bear injustice, no longer endure a hard fate? Don’t you agree, dear reader, that they who accept life in good spirits, whatever bad things life might also bring, are blessed?

Words such as those given just above are actually what Hans says, not the author, who indeed would do best just to stay in the background and keep the most scrupulous silence, rather than pressing forward, which doesn’t look good at all.

Tact and discretion are never anything other than attractive. Modestly stepping aside can never be recommended as a continual practice in strong enough terms.

Such severe and merciless dealings with oneself as presented here may admittedly be somewhat strange.

What blatant iron will and manifest adamantine discipline!

Whereupon the forcefully reprimanded writer sits up, although in truth he is rather shy, straight and says, as apologetically as apparently unfortunately rather cockily, that the tempting smell and scent of rösti potatoes with bacon is wafting if he is not grossly mistaken into his nose!

The matter must be looked into with the same promptitude as that with which it is reported that Hans has once again one fine Sunday afternoon, as on so many before, betaken himself on a jaunty and pleasant walk.

It was impossible for him to remember clearly after the fact every particular little detail concerning that lovely afternoon. He knew only that it was warm and nice out, and that the walker sat down first on a boulder in the fields but later for half an hour on the banks of a bluely quietly delightfully flowing stream. A man passing by said: Hello. To our hero, surely more of an idyllic than a dramatic, more of a comic than a tragic hero, it felt wonderful to be able to respond to this polite greeting in a free and natural way, to sit amid the green under a blue

sky with just a few clouds, and to gently regard the merry area lying all around him, which, for as far as he could see, was green, yellow, blue, and white, and through which breathed a wafting, childishly gentle, adorable wind from some, Hans himself was not quite sure which, direction.

He felt the urge to stand up and keep walking. Near an old and honorable building, formerly a monastery, he had himself brought across the river. The ferryman struck him as a figure from Dürer. The battles of Grandson and Murten came clearly into his mind, and yet the beautiful, good, calm, and cheerful country gave off the pleasant scent of peace, unremitting love of one's neighbor, lasting amicable accord, harmony, fidelity, and kindheartedness more than that of tumult, clashing weapons, battle cries, hostilities, and brutal disturbance of tranquillity.

Beautiful, respectable houses and cheerful parks stood and lay peacefully thereabouts. An attractive antiquity enveloped every object. Hans abandoned himself to a dream in which he was once again a little boy gently strolling into the Sunday evening light with his father and mother and brothers and sisters. While he dreamed along these lines, it seemed as though everything around him had turned infinitely soft and lovely, and he found it impossible to suppress a sweet feeling of melancholy.

But soon enough he was cheerful again. Love of humanity and the sorrows thereof, a lust for life and the pain therefrom rose exquisitely up like tall ghostly shapes in the pale, golden air of the summer evening. Softly the figures seemed to wave to him. A scent of river water spread through the region. Later, he was sitting in front of a stately guesthouse where, while couples strolled modestly down immaculate country roads and horse-drawn carts, bicycles, parents with children, and all sorts of other Sunday people passed slowly or rapidly by, he chatted excitedly with the comely hostess.

The calm of Sunday, the joy and calm of evening, ambled softly but majestically past, with wide eyes, as breath, memory, and feeling. From the picturesque village's chimneys puffed and smiled a bluish dinnertime smoke sighing softly through the still air. Now, in every kitchen, so Hans thought, they were making coffee and rösti, and having said this to himself he felt a most vigorous desire to once again dig in to some rösti himself.

He left the guesthouse. Numerous busy fisherman lined the evening canal. The railroad bridge shimmered silver and pink. What a monstrous wave of enchantment flooded in from everywhere across the whole world and covered everything.

Hans stepped into a village grocery store that was completely full of the smell of rösti, which made him practically perish with cravings,

although of course he did not dare to say anything since it was hardly proper to step into a building without so much as a by your leave and help eat dinner.

In any case, he had been able to chat with a guesthouse hostess, which, admittedly, was certainly not much, but surely was also not little. He valued constructive conversations highly.

To secretly relish the beautiful figure of Frau B— (whom he referred to as “the Oriental”) was either not at all or very important to him, depending on whether such behavior seemed pleasant to him at that particular moment. He always gave over a bit of time to suchlike and similar things. In the evening, on the promenade, he would now and then stroll along close behind the abovementioned lady, thinking all the while that it might perhaps be nicer for him if he were arm in arm with her instead, but nonetheless just the enjoyment of her captivating gait as well as the sight of her bewitching back left him fully satisfied. Enthusiasts are happy with little, in fact even often extremely miniscule things. One time, he met her on the lakeshore, where she cast him a fleeting glance that seemed to contain a certain quantity of regard. As a result, Hans flew straight, without in the least pausing to reflect upon whether such a journey was a good idea, to seventh heaven and remained there for a rather long time fully out of his senses.

Early one morning, he stood by the divinely glittering lake, near the landing, where he was witness to an utterly charming and poetic scene, namely by virtue of the fact that a group of schoolgirls was just returning home from their summer field trip in a ship sparkling magnificently in the morning sunshine.

The adorable thing about it was that the children were met by a stately choir or municipal band with lovely, graceful, cheerful melodies, giving them a reception as ceremonious as it was amusing and which looked extraordinarily lovely in the bright, happy landscape. Hans had never seen anything like it before, and just as little would anything nearly as nice subsequently ever come before his eyes again.

The beholder could never forget how the wonderful lake sparkled, everything light blue and light green and fairy white, how the whole surroundings smiled as though with darling, innocent girl’s lips, how all the brightly clad children marched on one after the other to brisk and lively music, strolled along into the city, instantly taking on shape and form at such a charming opportunity and turning as it were into the fluttering of doves, the twittering of swallows, or, better yet, a roundelay of angels dancing in the air, everything seeming so sweet and good and kind and happy and merry, and he impressed it upon his memory far too firmly to ever again be able to let it fall away

much less throw it off.

Still, even other than that there were things he saw that he later liked thinking back on.

For example, while standing by the lake in an evening rain shower, he saw people, holding umbrellas open over their heads and their clothes, gondoling comfortably back and forth across the lake deep into the night, a variety of conveyance that gave him a vivid picture of the customs and traditions in China or Japan, although his feet and shoes had never in his life trod upon either the former or the latter, nor had he seen either with his own eyes. On the other hand, a friend who had been there had told him a lot of stories about it.

A majestic boulevard of chestnut trees leading out to the lake, resembling a high, green hallway, a sap-green convent passageway or church nave, a corridor or a beautiful, sprightly grotto, and then again perhaps bearing some similarity to a long oval sultan's tent full of greenish decorative paintings and stage scenery, in any case unique and of very probably princely splendor in its way, in fact downright bewitching, just as likely to be found in some castle grounds or somewhere like that as where it actually was in fact to be found, and, incidentally, dating from the era of foreign rule or the time of the French, during which it was said to have been planted on the orders of a general, army corps commander, or imperious conqueror — Hans never stopped admiring or in other words continually admired it anew.

Such a long sentence may well give rise to some amazement. On account of its audacity it does doubtless deserve our notice. How lamentable that writers would rather express themselves simply and easily comprehensibly than capriciously and complicatedly.

Hans loved five to eight nearby communities and localities as dearly as if every single one of these thus-favored villages were his very own homeland and birthplace. He always made sure to dutifully and lovingly alternate the paying of visits to the various villages, perhaps giving slight preference to one or another of them without for all that meaning this partiality all too seriously, since in the end they were all fully equal in his affections.

He kept in living and faithful memory a companionable, gentle, old, good meadow path under the shadow of the tall walnut trees with a sweet, beautiful girl coming home from work who might well have made quite a good match for him as a wife under certain circumstances if she liked him, which he never dared to convince himself she did, since he told himself with rather good reason that such presumption and brazen impertinence would be fresh.

Likewise, a wide country road, swimming, shining in the light of the sunset, completely deluged with liquid yellow or gold, with all

sorts of pretty factory girls, whose faces, expressions, gestures, and figures were wonderfully wreathed in the bewitching phosphorescent flames of evening, stuck with him and clung faithfully to him — a sight that gave rise to the thought that he would have truly loved to put his arms around and caress every one of these young, sweet, feminine fellow human beings, which naturally could have proved to be a bold and thus difficult undertaking given their considerable number.

Another time, somewhat later of course, namely already in the middle of the following snowy, foggy winter, he saw on that same road two children standing right next to each other in silence, with the wild gypsyish hair of children surrounding their little faces, looking deeply out into the space before them from strange black eyes.

This and other things came to mind again and again in later years. Again and again it was like seeing each thing again, finding it again. Various and sundry things seen long before would sometimes occur to him new and fresh again, which made him happy.

To see an object again at a later hour purely through mere reflection may perhaps be more beautiful than the moment itself of actual experience and perception, he felt and said.

In general, children deeply moved him and their games delighted him. Was there not, alighting upon the children's games and children's groups to be seen here and there on the village streets alongside all the nice, old-fashioned architecturalities, always both the trace of grace and the allure of the poor?

Children are always poor and defenseless, after all, no matter how powerful, prosperous, and defenseful their parents might be. For Hans, every child was beautiful in the entirely unique way children are, he himself sometimes did not know quite why.

"Do I deserve so many pleasures?" he oftentimes asked himself when he found himself particularly well entertained by a lovely view, a good sentiment, or an especially rich feeling. Sometimes the world seemed to him unutterably good, warm, and bright. He had a tendency to stand still before certain beauties of landscape, architecture, or whatever other natural sort, like a painter who starts sketching out hues and outlines in his imagination as soon as he sees. Some of the things he liked to look at reminded him of the strange paintings of Cézanne. Another occasion might bring to mind the magnificent painter Renoir. Upon catching sight of a waving yellow cornfield with a delightful hot summer wind sweeping through it, playing gracefully with the stalks, he could not help but think of van Gogh, who painted such things with a perhaps almost terrifyingly ardent love.

When Hans was standing on a hill one time, from where he could

see spread out enticingly before him an extensive rich river region with all sorts of scattered fields, stands of trees, villages, church spires, and castle towers, he said to himself, “This beautiful segment of the globe, so radiant before me, inhabited by friendly human creatures, does it not from this distance look almost like a painting by a Dutch Old Master?” Nature often reminded him of art in this way, which was entirely natural, since after all in the end all art emerges from loving, maternal nature.

The grazing of the cows on the high mountain meadows, along with the charming, melodious tinkling of the bells so delightfully bound up with it; the beautifully free way the peaceful animals stood and lay around; the loafing of a certain, apparently unfortunately entirely useless average or exceptional person who clearly had inordinate amounts of time available for lying in the grass; on the one hand the echoing of and on the other hand the conscientious listening to just these soothing and sanctifying sounds, hearing this high, pure voice of ancient times, the trees and the good blue sky at peace all around, the cliffs, the quiet mountain cabins: all this absolutely refused to leave the memory of an extremely unserviceable but nonetheless still arguably otherwise quite nice, well-mannered, polite and respectable individual, namely Hans, nor did he want it to, since he seized with pleasure and an unquestionably heartfelt delight at all times upon anything beautiful and invigorating.

Of the bright, clear vineyard country by the lake with its cozy wine villages, the imposing boulders and outcroppings, the delicate, slender church spires, the graceful walls supporting the vines, and the steep, precipitous, narrow streets running through it all; of the good men and women he saw busily, undourly creating, building, and working, which made him, I should rather hope, not only marvel at but even be properly ashamed of his own laziness, which in turn, thank God, will have filled him with some serious concern; of the subsequent eventual sitting inside in the pub over a lightly foaming and sparkling white wine, which in his prominent or negligible opinion tasted excellent; of the venerable old lady by the pub window; of the dark-tabled, amiable room itself with several depictions on the wall from the world-famous story of the prodigal son mentioned in a charming novella by Pushkin alongside other attractive illustrations: of all this, and of the arbor and outdoor seating on the lakeside where it was so marvelous to sit in the evenings, he (you know who I mean) thought with no less pleasure than of various other happy, pleasant things.

Architectural matters, such as for instance certain medieval castles and seats of nobility on the lake, or, in the city, the city’s church on its magnificent raised platform, or an old fountain crowned

with the striking, impressive figure of a man-at-arms, of necessity remained no less memorable than various nearly just as meaningful and beautiful things like for example a round fortress tower with merlons and embrasures, which would not have been out of place in Damascus or somewhere else like that, or a nicely situated swan rookery, where ducks, geese, pigeons, sparrows, chickens, and swans could be observed as well as fed, or several and similar other items.

Since all of these things literally swarmed and seethed to be diligently, properly stored up in his memory, there always remained a large number left over that he should have paid equal attention to, although there was in fact no possible way he could have possessed enough brainpower to do so.

But at least there was the day when he helped two poor village schoolboys pull and push their cart for a ways, an occurrence or diminutive incident that stayed with Hans always, the same way a faithful, obedient dog makes sure to run after his master or mistress always. However trivial the little event might have been in and of itself, it nonetheless burrowed its way deeply into his inner life. The deed took place on a steep mountain road, where the two boys were struggling to try to move a cart from the spot where it found itself. One of them even started crying because the difficult task just did not want to be accomplished. In vain was one desperate expenditure of strength after another sacrificed to the attempt.

Now since our Mister Hans happened to come walking down the road just then and saw the desperate situation, he helped push, thereby making the thing progress nice and quickly. When the little lads politely thanked the grown-up passerby for his assistance, he thought and said to himself:

“How beautiful it is to be able to lend a hand and help someone. How happy this most charming of all little adventures makes me. How the tear-stained face before me has just this minute been transformed into an unclouded, satisfied, noticeably smiling one.

“Often enough have I longed to be able to do some small good in the world, something kind in some way. And now a modest opportunity to be good-hearted, feel human sympathy, and help out has just presented itself.”

The fact is, Hans had for the longest time held it against himself that all he did was roam around for himself, free and easy, neither attached to other people nor bound up in some way with rough-and-tumble day-to-day working life but rather just flitting past human beings and social conditions, not so much standing on his own two feet in life itself as alas instead simply strolling past it, admittedly in no sense inattentive to the cares and joys of his fellow man but still in truth moving past them too quickly, too exclusively concerned with

himself, and therefore only looking on at active, suffering life rather than actually living it — too much the spectator and correspondingly much too little the active participant, the essentially affected party concerned.

One time, it happened that he went walking with an old gentleman, whose white hair made a deep impression on him, up a moderately high hill. Several cherry trees adorning the road were thickly covered with ripening red fruit, smiling out from the soft pale green of the foliage like a kind of cheerful eye.

The two of them walked into the nearby forest. Before they reached it, they passed through a little newly built area or nice outlying district.

The old man proved to have the liveliest interest in everything that looked in any way worth seeing, in a manner that made his old age give an impression of utmost youth.

The sight of the pleasant green forest, which looked like a green capital city, ceremonial residence, king's palace, and amiable-solemn high cathedral in green in one, gave great pleasure to the old man's ancient eyes and heart. Hans noticed this and it made him happy. To be permitted to see someone made happy makes us happy ourselves, provided we are decent people.

Out from the sweetly hidden depths of the forest came the sounds of the woodland birds, an army as unwarlike as it was invisible, performing an afternoon concert in the best possible way, which would have been able to satisfy even the most spoiled and fastidious ears.

Visibly glad as he was about his well-preserved health, which allowed him to hike in the mountains in order to enjoy the lovely view in person even in this his time of old age, the old man expressed the opinion, almost with pride but in any case with uncommon good spirits, that his old legs did his bidding better than young legs did that of most young people. Hans, contemplating the January snow on the old man's head with a certain amount of pity, could not do enough to approve the vitality and joie de vivre he saw the man displaying.

"If accumulated years and long since entered-upon fragility are still able to greet the world so joyously, how committed in every sense to good humor and grateful affirmation of life must not those who are still young and strong feel?" was the noble thought that came to his consciousness in the company of the old man.

On August First, which as is well known is our fatherland's most beautiful holiday, all sorts of boat rides were organized on the lake in the evening under flashing, hissing fireworks. Rowboats and sailboats glided this way and that through the water while a large crowd of cheerful people stood and promenaded on the streetlight-bedecked

shore. Rockets flew high into the night sky only to rain back onto the lake as a scintillating spray of fire, a spectacle that looked almost like a Venetian night. The incandescent spheres of fireworks shone down from above; through the silent blackness of the night shot magnificent if admittedly artificial stars. Farther off in the distance, high atop the mountains, the memorial fires burned. The night was still and warm, like a carefully locked room or like a high, beautiful, dark, aristocratic hall where everyone involuntarily falls silent because unnecessary noise seems inappropriate.

On the nearby forested mountains, among all sorts of scattered, light-green hazelnut shrubs and isolated taller trees standing all around, Hans found places to play and rest that were more lovely that any you could have probably ever seen anywhere else. There were places there that Hans could tear himself away from only with great difficulty, since they invited him to remain in what seemed like everlasting sitting and lying by offering the wanderer and mortal creature an uninterrupted slumber.

Hans lay down, now here, now there, on the green, soft, familiar ground thickly covered with sweet-smelling grass and wildflowers, looked up at the sky, and stood up and kept walking so that he could soon thereafter lie back down again once more in the meadow under some other tree in some other little clearing.

In such a way, he spent the most beautiful hours. It seemed to him that he had never before felt so easy and light. No longer did his happy heart encounter anything dark, at most only something half dark every now and then. Illusions took possession of his unconstricted soul. He threw himself into the arms of the enjoyment of outdoor nature much like the way a lover throws herself into those of her beloved, a mother into those of her child, a wife into those of her faithful and good husband, or a friend into those of his friend, to hold fast, full of trust, to the good and the beautiful.

As he lay there quietly, he saw people come and go who took just as great if not even greater pleasure in the beauty and freedom, breath and movement, ease, calm, and peace spread out all around him as he, and who felt if not happier than he about all these straightforwardnesses and suchlike reverberations then certainly just as happy.

His lazy loafing increased noticeably from day to day, not entirely unlike the waters of a great flood. Hans thought: “I really do have to see to it soon that I start to work hard.” Iron resolutions and steadfast vows are after all inherently beautiful things. Hans did not however for all that start to work hard for a long time. Maybe it would come to him later, he consoled himself.

Plucking and eating whole hand- or fistfuls of wild strawberries

he found very pleasing. Possibly the time will come one day when anyone caught in such states of idleness or sluggardly activities is thrown in jail and sentenced to hard labor.

Hans was glad he did not live in Sparta, where something like that could happen to him. He definitely preferred Athens.

On one of his multifarious exploratory expeditions, which he naturally was rarely or never in the habit of letting stray beyond his close vicinity, he met on a lonely mountaintop an old farm laborer with whom he formed an extraordinarily suitable, warm, although only fleeting friendship. In the course of their enjoyable conversation it came out that the laborer was an openhearted, poor, truly very poor, and, it bears repeating, poor man. Yes, there are poor, unspeakably laboriously and hardworking people forced to swallow the bitterest fate in this seemingly often so free and rich and happy-go-lucky world.

Moreover, in good time our wanderer, patroller, and reconnaissance marcher got to know a country inn that resembled an aristocratic baronial villa more than what he would have imagined it might resemble. There there were God knows what kind of noble, in many ways probably misunderstood, melancholy-patrician, gentle, exacting goldfish shimmering and wagging their fins back and forth in an utterly strange and peculiar way in grottoes with fountains, which seemed entirely as it should be. Alongside them, of course, there were also other, not particularly interesting fishes, ordinary, banal, occasionally contemptible, astonishingly undistinguished, pathetic.

Elegant ornamental clocks of breathtaking age placed in wonderful rooms were to be found, which were able to make Hans quite simply go insane with wonder, swoon with rapture, and half lose his mind with admiration, which he promptly did, since he was easily amazed and enjoyed being so.

In addition, on the occasion of a nighttime railroad journey he saw sitting next to a happy husband an absolutely not happy, rather, so it seemed, utterly unhappy and thus pitiable wife. Hans might almost have become embroiled in an admittedly perhaps romantic but nonetheless obviously truly very stupid and unnecessary adventure out of sheer precipitous overwhelming pity. Luckily the thought occurred to him in time that in this particular case it might just as plausibly be a question of travel fatigue as inconsolability and marital drama, for which reason he thereupon laughed at himself as happily and heartily as could be.

In addition, he nosed out and discovered occasionally two to three pictures of student life that seemed intended to attest that no one in the world lived lives as jovially and lustily as students did. Furthermore, various effective colored images from the Franco-

Prussian War of ’70 were amiably located and superlatively ferreted out by our fact finder, reconnoiterer, and nuncio in a country inn.

An exquisite baroque castle portal of skillfully wrought iron was happily both perceived and afterward attentively inspected again and again.

Additional especially remarkable curiosities included the sign for a pub, depicting a gracious deer, as well as another guesthouse sign, portraying in a style demonstrating certain similarities with Assyrian art a strange lion with its tongue stuck out.

A slender, proud lady dressed in black whom Hans encountered near a fashionable, exclusive grand hotel in the forest, thereby ascertaining that she had penetrating eyes, should also be mentioned.

Let us also tack on here several pieces of marble animal garden statuary, even though marble is harder and more monumental than it is dainty and suitable for tacking on.

On a bright little sunny expedition or gentle march that carried Hans past multiple charming gardens and all sorts of prospering orchards, he arrived at a village church with a weathercock flashing gold on the tip of the spire and magnificent Gothic windows whose merry glass paintings he found charming.

Everything around the church was bright and at the same time dark green; damp and at the same time shimmering in the sun. He entered the church- or graveyard, where he thoughtfully and deliberately read the pale, barely still legible inscriptions on the old gravestones that were darkly ensnared in boxwood and other unusual shrubbery whose leaves and needles were like slender quills and tender hands.

In this contemplative site of the unavoidable end of earthly life, it smelled of and was resplendent with the beauty and happiness of summer. Life and death, blossoming and decay, birdsongs and human graves, blue sky and memorial inscriptions seemed here to have grown deeply intertwined with each other. Hans stayed for a long time in the little village cemetery that contained such a sweet poetry.

Afterward, he saw a parsonage that could just as well have been a fancy gentleman’s house as a modest and pious clergyman’s. The merry sound of piano music poured out of the open window into the happy morning countryside.

“The pastor here seems to be a music-lover, unless by chance this person playing so prettily is a pastoress. Since those who love music are surely always also lovers of humankind, it is unquestionably very fitting for a preacher of God’s word to be a lover and faithful friend of melodies. I truly envy this unknown (to me) clergyman, who can live in such a beautiful, agreeable country house and ardently indulge in early-morning piano reveries. If I did not have to be afraid of coming

at an extremely inopportune time, or of seeming to be shameless, impertinent, and cheeky to a clearly high degree, I would be truly happy to enter that stately house in order to pay a passing visit and painstakingly get to know all of the splendors and idiosyncrasies it might contain. Still, being permitted to observe and inspect such a fine building only from without can and should be enough to make me happy, and sincerely so."

Silently saying this and similar things to himself, the walker walked peacefully on, casting his attentive eyes upon a homey rope-maker's workshop situated under tall fruit trees. Diverse and sundry rural and rustic beauty and secrets of native intelligence and amicability were everywhere there, calmly and grandly strolling along. The farmland spreading far and wide resembled, in its beautiful, rich fecundity and with its many pleasant faces and things, a folk song or hymn, honest and profound and good in every sense, full of simplicity but nonetheless also full of grandeur.

Attractive houses turned up, sturdy and friendly. One shabby little house on a gently sloping meadow looked in its kindly negligibility like a proclamation of peace, an expression of the enjoyment of existence, an embodiment of unassuming joie de vivre.

Hans saw beehives as well as bees flying about in the bright air, likewise chicken coops as well as clucking chickens, likewise a pussycat luxuriously sunning itself and an additional adorable tiny black-and-white kitten.

Now here, now there he rambled around transfigured, silently enchanted, enraptured, and totally and completely entertained, found himself in a stretch of woods, walked nice and straight back out of it, reached meadows and fields, came upon a crowd of schoolboys, and emerged in a remote village lane where as punishment for his roving around he was extremely frighteningly barked and yapped at by a vigilant dog.

Everywhere he went and looked, he found always one and the same beauty, cheer, and heart. What would have been the point of any variations? Similar things, identical things, must again and again be good and beautiful and lovable enough anew. Without question, one and the same thing remains always the most beautiful and best. Why should it ever change? The same things were always highly surprising for him. Is not one year also like another, and every individual life likewise? Are not repetitions more welcome than oppositions? Calm, gentle, dear equanimity not more desirable than hard, chaotic mayhem and drastic differences? Must something that seems in some way right and just then be violently replaced by something different? Wouldn't all this goodness and pleasurability be merely interrupted by novelty and change? Does not the reasonable

person always heartily welcome the sight of that which was once pleasant and inspiriting in ever new sympathetic similar or very same forms?

On a narrow stone jetty that keenly impressed itself upon his memory and that led out a short way into the lake, Hans liked to strip down on warm and of course sometimes too on raw windy days, with a west no less than an east or mountain wind blowing, in sunny no less than rainy weather, to go swimming, which was flat-out unspeakably nice for him. One time, he wrote to a friend:

“Since I have a nice and charming and comfortable place to go swimming that doesn’t cost me one red cent, I may perhaps be justified in saying that I have the same entertainments at my disposal as a baron, or in other words that no prince has it better than I do.”

On the many glorious hours he spent swimming he thought back in the course of his later life with always the same great pleasure. The lake lay before him celestially blue, often entirely white, as ravishingly bright as a jewel, and the mountain cabin amid the towering forest soared up on the opposite shore in a wonderful, gentle motion.

One time, when Hans was swimming or had already been swimming, a boy who seemed to be spending (or to have already been spending) his time fishing walked up to him out on the jetty, giving rise thereby to a pleasant little chitchat, equivalently amusing to them both.

“So, you’ve been fishing,” Hans said to the boy. “Did you catch anything?”

“No, not today,” came the answer in a cheerful voice. “But it looks like you’ve been swimming here.”

“That’s right,” said Hans.

After a while the boy asked, “You are who and you are doing what?”

“You want to know?” came the smiling reply from Hans. He found the question from this boy, who probably lived in a nearby village, extraordinarily funny.

The day was of a wonderful, bluish gentleness. The weather seemed good, like an extremely well brought up adorable little child. Life, which is so often anything but gentle, resembled in this moment a happy, carefree smile. A soft, dreamy morning breeze wafted and stroked caressingly from the west across the trees, whose leaves began to move, producing a lisping tinkle. The lake was like a swan enraptured by its own beauty. A few silent boats lay floating on the shimmering white surface of the water. A steamship hurried across the middle of the large lake.

“To tell you who and what I am and what I am doing is actually

rather difficult. From the manner and fashion in which I have been swimming and dreaming away the morning here you can tell that at present I am lazier than I am hardworking. Perhaps I look like an absolute layabout, no? And yet there have been times when I felt compelled to create, felt driven to do things, felt as though it were imperative to do the work of four or six. And it certainly seemed to me that this made me unbelievably happy. To achieve, to solve, everything that goes along and together with that is truly a joy, and I believe that such a stern, demanding period will surely return for me someday. I feel full well that I am meant to create, to move with the power and speed of lightning, and to enjoy fatiguing activity. And yet I tell myself that a person has to take things as they come. When you are faced with a happiness that is not forbidden, you must seize and enjoy it. We convince ourselves that there are sorrows as well as joys in this world and that when unavoidable difficulties are hurled upon us and harsh realities hurtle toward us, we have to endure them and patiently let them afflict us. In the meantime, it does me good down to the depths of my soul to sit here and look out at the water in the knowledge that it is divinely beautiful to be permitted to pass such hours in so doing. But while I have been telling you these things, which you probably barely understand, the time will have come to leave."

With a smile the boy said, "I have to go home too. Farewell." And with that, they parted.

Yes, along with many other happy harmless hours in the bosom of nature, this was a lovely hour for Hans. The summer passed like a dream. Then came fall. The green turned to brown, yellow, and red. The green summer forest was transformed into a many-colored Indian woods. A fantastic fog crept through the gardens, parks, forests, and buildings in the mornings and evenings. In the fall, too, he experienced beautiful day after beautiful day. Time passed amiably. The weather stayed mild deep into November. On December 20th, the first snow fell. Hans thought he would have to start heating his room soon, otherwise it would be unpleasant to live there.

The winter was beautiful too. The middle of the cold season is a magnificent time to think about summer warmth. Hans did so with great pleasure. Warming thoughts of summer stayed vital and alive within him through the whole winter. Gradually spring returned again, after which came the summer, resembling the previous year's practically down to a hair's breadth. Groves and forests once more took on their delicious, darling green color. In August the war broke out.

Now things got serious for Hans.

The Executive Federal Council ordered a general mobilization.

There were anxiously talking and listening people in all the streets. Every segment of the population was seized with the gravest consternation. Women and men went around in a state of excitement, looking each other in the eye with earnest questioning gazes. What everyone would have liked to think was impossible was suddenly naked, hard, shocking reality. Everywhere it looked like something was lurking; the otherwise so gentle air resounded with what was like the roaring of tigers.

All at once there rose up before Hans a tall and imperious figure: Duty. Up until that point he had known no obligations. It had hitherto barely ever occurred to him to think about military service. Now, though, he knew what he had to do. He made the decision quickly, since there was nothing to take into consideration. All his previous thoughts fell away. What had just a moment before seemed essential trickled away at once into vanishing unessentiality.

The general's name was in everyone's mouth.

Hans went to the woods one more time, to say goodbye.

"Am I now supposed to leave behind all good, beloved, and beautiful dreams?" he said, "and cast aside ineluctably everything that was once precious to me? Is what was valuable to me now to be valueless, what was intimately familiar and closely related to be alien and strange, the significant utterly insignificant, the known unknown, the important unimportant, and everything I used to keenly observe from now on invisible? Must beauty fade and everything that was once recognizable be henceforth entirely unrecognizable? Can for that which is worthy of yearning never again be yearned and that which is desirable never again be desired? Shall all this be as though it had never been noticed at all?

"Well, so be it. Onwards, then, to do one's duty as a brave soldier, to salute the flag I already see fluttering in the wind. Now let the land among whose sons I number be served and my soul be a soul that loves its fatherland."

He took the train to Bern to enlist.

1920

Biographical Notes

ROBERT WALSER (1878–1956) was born into a German-speaking family in Biel, Switzerland. He left school at fourteen and led a wandering, precarious existence while writing his poems, novels, and vast numbers of the "prose pieces" that became his hallmark. In 1933 he was confined to a sanatorium, which marked the end of his writing career. Among Walser's works available in English are Berlin Stories and Jakob von Gunten (both available as NYRB classics), Thirty Poems, The Walk, The Tanners, Microscripts, The Assistant, The Robber, Masquerade and Other Stories, and Speaking to the Rose: Writings, 1912–1932.

DAMION SEARLS has translated many classic twentieth-century writers, including Proust, Rilke, Elfriede Jelinek, Christa Wolf, Hans Keilson, and Hermann Hesse. For NYRB Classics, he edited Henry David Thoreau's The Journal: 1837–1861, translated Nescio's Amsterdam Stories, and will retranslate André Gide's Marshlands. He has received Guggenheim, National Endowment for the Arts, and Cullman Center fellowships and is currently writing a book about Hermann Rorschach and the cultural history of the Rorschach test.

BEN LERNER is the author of three books of poetry and a novel, Leaving the Atocha Station. He has been a finalist for the National Book Award in poetry, a Fulbright Scholar in Spain, and a fellow of the Howard and Guggenheim Foundations.